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Ramana Ashtottaram

36. ओम् वेद वेदान्त तत्त्वज्ञाय नमः

Om veda vedānta tattvajñāya namaḥ

Prostration to one who has understood the inner significance of the Vedas and of Vedanta.

Sri Ramana recognised and was absorbed in *chidananda*, Awareness-Bliss. He realised within the Heart the essence and import, the source and the goal, of the Vedic and Vedanta scriptures. In his life, he fully embodied and directly revealed the reality to which the scriptures are only pointers.

He exemplified the complete harmony of thought, speech and action.

37. ओम् चिन्मुद्रिणे नमः

Om cinmudriṇe namaḥ

Prostration to the Bestower of supreme wisdom by silence.

That, which is called Brahman, the supreme reality, cannot be imparted to others by words. It can only be taught by *Mouna*, unqualified silence. Though Bhagavan graciously wrote explanatory texts and spoke to all who were sincere in their enquiries, it was the silent, powerful presence of Sri Bhagavan that was His supreme teaching.



EDITORIAL

Silence

The one Self, the Sole Reality, alone exist eternally. When even the Ancient teacher, Dakshinamurti, revealed It through speechless eloquence, who else could convey it by speech?

— v.5, Five Verses on the Self

It has been reported by one who was fortunate enough to sit in the Old Hall when Bhagavan was there in his body, that often the place was vibrant with lively conversation or with laughter when Bhagavan told a story or a joke. There was intense concentration when someone would perhaps ask a question which was keenly listened to by many people sitting there, and the answer was of utmost interest. People asked for Bhagavan's opinion on matters of doctrine, or even for his opinion on an item in the newspaper. Every day was full and vivid, but most of all when Bhagavan would suddenly switch off from the outer world and turn inwards. From seeming like an ordinary, albeit special man, he was transformed into an awesome and godlike being. His whole demeanour was majestic and withdrawn. The Hall became instantly and spontaneously silent. One could hear a pin drop and people even tried to breathe quietly. The sheer power of Bhagavan's silence had an impact more commanding than any speech.

People today who visit the ashram for the first time often ask whether there is a living guru who can give them instructions. Invariably the answer is that though Sri Ramana left his physical body in 1950, his presence is very much evident and if one was to sit quietly in the Hall, his grace would become so obvious that any further need for verbal confirmation would be unnecessary. It is the experience of those who have waited with patience and with faith that the grace of wisdom and the healing balm of understanding was granted, and in such abundance that they could scarcely have dreamt possible.

What is this grace and how is it that in silence we can receive clarification and healing for the problems and sufferings which beset us?

In his lifetime Bhagavan often referred to 'automatic divine action' when people came into his presence and their unasked questions were answered or their anguish assuaged. They were subtly transformed without a word being said. It was such a common occurrence for those who lived long enough in his presence that they took it for granted that his grace was always available in direct proportion to their need.

The fact that we turn to Bhagavan in the first instance reveals that we are aware that there is something missing in our lives. It expresses itself as confusion and pain; a discontent which cannot be identified; a physical ailment which medicine cannot cure. There is a lack of peace and we hunger for a solution.

What we fail to recognise in the beginning is that the cause of the discontent is within ourselves and not, as we apparently think, solely from some external source. It is much easier to blame others for our difficulties. We accuse outside circumstances or other people for the predicament we are in rather than accept even a modicum of responsibility for our quandary.

It has been said that on our journey through life, if we have not listened to our inner conscience which guides us, life will create the circumstances, including such suffering as is necessary for us to wake up and act appropriately to lift the clouds of ignorance which envelop us. The first step we should make is to be aware of who we think we are.

For those who think this world is a mindless machine where events occur by happenstance then the idea that each of us has a destiny is absurd. But if we do believe there is meaning in our lives then the notion that we each are in search of a profound sense of purpose resonates in some deep area of the heart and influences who we are. We each face the choice of being heroes or heroines in our quest, or victims who are at the mercy of each passing discord.

We need silence to listen to that inner prompting which mysteriously crops up at crucial moments in our lives. It is impossible to be receptive when the cacophony of the mind refuses to be stilled. The noise turns us round and round with no apparent solution. We can see clearly in those blessed moments when we are at peace with ourselves and the world around us. They are rare moments and we pine for their recurrence.

There are degrees of silence as there are of sound. We recognize the difference between, say, a whisper or a song and a clamour or din. The silence Bhagavan expressed is entirely different. There is a clear distinction between the silence which is an absence of noise and the silence which transcends both conventional silence and sound. In Hinduism there is the sound of OM which is the basis of all sound and can disclose the unfathomable silence of the universe. In Christianity it is said that 'In the beginning was the Word'. Any sound must have emerged from the cradle of silence, and the power of that silence is tremendous as was the silence that surrounded Bhagavan when he discarded his everyday persona.

The front gates of the ashram are an invitation to enter and receive an infusion of the peace we crave. There seems to be a curtain which is parted as we walk into the precincts of the ashram. We sense there is something different in the atmosphere. There is a shift in our consciousness. We seem more alive. There is a quickening of the spirit — we have felt the first glimmering of what is called grace.

There are many stories in the numerous spiritual traditions about the workings of grace. It is an essential ingredient in the transformation of the student who seeks truth. Until we experience the effects of grace for ourselves there is no adequate way to describe its function

except by metaphor. It is like the sun which releases light and frees us from the dingy grayness which infects our outlook. It is a confident energy field which restores to us the sense of fullness and completeness. It is a radiance which warms the heart and welcomes us home.

Perhaps there is a mechanical explanation for the functioning of grace but for our limited minds it is a miracle. What we do know is that it is available and its successful expression manifests through the benign influence of the sacred catalyst, Sri Ramana.

How do we actively contact this presence? The key is silence.

It is said that Bhagavan is a manifestation of Dakshinamurti that aspect of Shiva who, as the supreme teacher of knowledge (*jnana*), teaches in silence.¹

In order to receive we first must be empty of our own expectations. It is in silence that it is possible to meet and fuse with this charismatic presence. Bhagavan is not a personality who must be won with gifts or flattery. This presence is entirely free of any demands. It is openness to listen which awakens the dialogue. Bhagavan once said, “When heart speaks to heart what need for words?”

When we are silent there are no barriers to understanding. The mind is quiescent and receptive. It is only then in mutual consent we can experience the momentous sensation of oneness, the sense of wholeness.

Silence is not emptiness as we normally know it. It is not a negative, on the contrary it is a potency, an expansion which is unaffected by distraction. When we sit quietly in the Hall and enter deeply into that timeless space, what need is there for explanations? It is self evident and fresh.

In the outward silence of the Old Hall the inner silence releases us from the gravity of our desires and fears. We realise we are not dependent on the fulfilment of desires in order to be happy; the grace itself is our fulfilment.

¹ Sankara in his commentary of the *Brahma Sutras* quotes the sage Baskali who is questioned about the absolute. He remains silent each time his student requested him for understanding. After the student's third appeal, the sage said, “I am teaching but you do not follow. The Self is Silence.” *Brahma Sutras*, 3.2.7.

After our first taste of grace we tend to think that it is necessary for us to be in physical silence to be absorbed in tranquility. This is incorrect. With time and effort we understand that it is not the corporeal silence that is a pre-requisite to enter into the heart, but mental silence. It is not an emptiness but an acute awareness of now. By cultivating equanimity and patience our mind matures to the point when it is irrelevant whether the external world is quiet or not. We are unaffected.

When the Mathrubuteswara temple, the Mother's shrine, was being built from the late 1930's to 1948, there was the constant background sound of stone chipping. There were some who complained to Bhagavan about the relative lack of silence in the ashram. In response, Bhagavan said that we should ignore the sounds by focusing our attention on the enquiry... to whom is the noise a distraction?

The ideal human state is one of pure consciousness, however if this state proves elusive it can be of help to focus the attention on the gap between sounds, and thus appreciate the formless awareness. It can lessen our dependency on identification with form, most notably in this case with noise!

If one could make yet another analogy, then sound could no doubt be associated with colour, in which case silence would then be white, in other words an absence of colour. In physics we learn about the prism which focuses all the colours, but when they are all blended into one...then we get white which looks like an absence of colour but is in fact all the colours united into one whole. Similarly deep silence of the quiet mind can subsume noise: it recognises noise but is unaffected by it.

Silence is not dependent on the absence of assault by exterior sound. It is always there, humming, if we but listen. It is the background, the screen upon which our thoughts rise and fall. Silence is the sound of that spacious awareness which captivates and draws us deep into the Heart. When we 'hear' the silence, it is not we who command it; rather it is we who are absorbed by it. True silence is not an activity, it is a state. We cannot make silence — it is there to be discovered and the sensitive comprehension of Bhagavan's presence makes it possible. ▲



Sadhana in Advaita

Part Two: Pitfalls in Advaita Sadhana

SWAMI MADHURANANDA

As every field of investigation has its traps, so too with Advaita sadhana or Advaitic practice. The traps do not lie in the sadhana itself, but in the way we perceive it. They can be categorized as follows: 1) snares of the intellect; 2) *laya*; 3) spiritual experiences; 4) the thought 'I am enlightened!'; and 5) the idea that Advaitic practice is not relevant to daily life.

Snares of the intellect

The intellect creates traps in two ways.

i.) The most formidable trap is the idea that a sharp mind can grasp Reality intellectually. This is the greatest hurdle against a deepening of

insight. It is largely intellectuals who are attracted to Advaita, and they tend to believe that by analysing Vedantic concepts they can easily attain the state of Reality. But this is like chasing a mirage when seeking water.

Many traditional teachers emphasize *shastradhyana*¹ as the central practice in Advaita sadhana. In India, if a monk tells us this we are carried away. We think, 'What an easy way to enlightenment for us intellectuals! How blessed we are!' Intellectuals tend to fall into this trap, thinking: 'How beautiful it is to know that Vedanta teaches that our nature itself is Reality and that our only problem is ignorance!' This statement is absolutely true as it asserts that we are already That which we seek. The problem, however, lies in the teaching that it is through thinking and through study of the scriptures (*shastras*) that we will gain enlightenment. Endless scriptural study is a serious error because it strengthens the habit of *thinking*. Such study is founded on a fundamental error, different from an error in mathematics, or physics, because it assumes that (a) one has a 'self' and is an individual person; and that (b) one needs something external to oneself to help one to get rid of this 'truly existing' selfhood. The moment you depend on the thinking mind to guide you, you implicitly assume that your Reality is not here and now, and that to discover our Reality will take time. All this is mental delusion. *How can you get at Reality by seeking it in the future, when it is already here right now?* The more you study and the more you reflect on concepts in order to gain enlightenment, the more you indirectly assert that you are *not* Reality. In thinking like this, you are falsely *conditioning* your mind, reinforcing your ignorance. Because, as long as the thinking mind is in full swing, Advaita is out of question. To realize Non-Duality through thinking is an impossibility.

I wonder whether teachers who emphasize the study of *sastras* as the only way to enlightenment ever make their disciples realize the futility of endless study or endless thinking. If teachers don't do this, how is that deep sense of true surrender to arise in the heart of

¹ Studying the scriptures.

the practitioner? But if they did do this, would anybody study Vedanta for years and years? Unless study is done in order to *negate* the need for any engagement of the mind and the intellect in the search for existential truth, it is entirely futile. Any serious seeker who is a mature practitioner will see the absurdity of extensive scriptural study in order to realize Truth. Bhagavan was once asked by a crestfallen devotee, "What can I do, as I have not studied Vedanta?" A most beautiful and humorous answer came from this glorious sage. Bhagavan replied that to study the scriptures in order to know one's Self, is like a man's shaving the image of his face in a mirror, rather than his own face.

Reality, of course, is not the birthright of intellectuals, it belongs to everyone, intellectual or not. Anyone who claims that it can only be understood by intellectuals is guilty of blasphemy. Reality or Non-Duality (Advaita) *is* our true nature, not the intellect, which is impermanent and a delusion. It disappears the moment we enter deep, dreamless sleep. A fine intellect is granted to few, but Reality is granted to all. So if we seek absolute peace we can embrace Advaita with full confidence. Our earnest desire to be free of suffering and to gain peace is enough to take us to Reality.

ii.) Another trap that intellectuals may fall into, is in misunderstanding the Upanishadic dictum 'I am Brahman (Reality, the Self)'. Intellectuals generally have the tendency, though perhaps only unconsciously, to look for prestige and authority in which case, it can take them a *very* long time to realize that it is *not* the egocentric individual who realizes 'I am Brahman'. Bhagavan very clearly explained that *our true nature*, which is the 'Real I' or 'Brahman' or the Formless Absolute, *is not this pseudo 'I'*, which everyone thinks of as 'I'. *It is Reality that knows itself as Reality*, it is *not a person*, not an individual, who knows Reality. It is Brahman who realizes Brahman. The personality, the ego, *can never* know Reality. It is the *silencing* and subduing of the personality/mind in the absolute stillness of the true Self-nature, which provides the opportunity to know the Real. This is the undeniable fact.

Laya

Laya is the pleasant, peaceful state one may get into while meditating. One acquires it through persistent meditation, but its apparent peacefulness is actually mental torpor or mental 'sinking'. This is a very tricky state of mind, which requires great alertness. If one is not aware of the danger of *laya*, one might meditate for many years without even beginning to purify one's deep-rooted *vasanas* (latent mental tendencies). So it is important to be on one's guard always against *laya*. In *laya* one feels very calm. But the alert practitioner notices that though he or she was peaceful, something was missing. This awareness only arises, however, if one has repeatedly entered the state of dynamic stillness. A practitioner who knows this wonderful stillness will not be deceived by *laya*. However, if one has not experienced true stillness, *laya* may be difficult to identify. One way to do this, is to check whether, within the stillness, one also has a vivid *awareness* that one *exists*. Another way is to honestly examine one's reactions to external objects. If one follows one's attractions and aversions as instinctively as ever, or if one still blames the 'external' world for one's sufferings, then one's meditation practice is *not* moving towards awakening, but towards *laya*. If one is alert against sinking into *laya*, one can return to dynamic stillness just by asking the mind the question 'Who am I?'. Thus the very act of noticing *laya* is enough to destroy it, and to put one in the state of genuine stillness.

Spiritual Experiences

To long for spiritual experiences is merely to extend one's search for pleasure in the gross world to more subtle planes. It shows that *the ego-mind's desire for pleasure* is intense. Those who get these experiences do everything they can to repeat them. They get the feeling that they are superior to others. However, those who have experienced real peace, realize that no other experience is as soothing and pleasant as this peace.

All experiences, *including spiritual ones*, fail to give us lasting satisfaction. We therefore continually seek new experiences. There is no end to this grasping. But, despite new spiritual experiences, peace

remains absent. Only the practitioner who has tasted dynamic peace will know how precious it is, of more worth than any experience, whether sensory or spiritual. One should therefore aim for this peace alone. The wise person seeks only this peace, by returning afresh to the silence of the Self again and again.

The search for *any* experience, whether the rising of the Kundalini or a vision of God, only binds us to the body. Even giving importance to the 'heart centre' on the right side of the chest may blind us to knowing the Real, which is here and now. If someone only looks forward to spiritual experiences he starts living in conflict, because he moves away from the ever-existing stillness within him, which he can experience at any moment. Or he may suppress difficult emotions when they arise, thus losing the precious opportunity to clean them away. Such cleansing or purification of one's emotions gives one immense opportunities to experience dynamic stillness even when one's senses are wide awake. It is possible to experience Peace even with one's eyes wide open. All these important opportunities are missed if one is fixated on gaining spiritual experiences, like feeling the vibrations of the 'Heart centre'. We must understand very clearly that Reality is our own true nature, our Self-nature, and that it is everywhere and nowhere. Only then will the conflict in our minds end, and the destruction of our *vasanas* begin. This alone enables us to turn to the ever-existing Peace within us.

'I am the enlightened one'

Due to their brief glimpses of dynamic peace, some people, even though they are just beginners, claim that they are fully enlightened. This is mere delusion. Enlightenment is not a state where one says, '*I am enlightened! How great I am!* All other beings need to be saved by *me!*' As has already been explained, this is because *enlightenment is not an experience that happens to an individual*. It is *not* a personal experience. It is impersonal. Yet it does not happen in isolation from other beings. This is the paradox that the great Nisargadatta Maharaj described as the experience, 'I am nothing, and yet I am everything'. So if a person says, '*I am enlightened, you are not!*' we can be sure he is not enlightened at all!

As long as someone searches for pleasure in any form, he or she is not enlightened. As long as he feels psychological pain, he is not enlightened. Physical pain, however, is the result of *prarabdha*² and so can afflict a *jnani*. However, because of the perfect equanimity with which the *jnani* regards it, it is reduced in intensity. So, no person can claim 'I am enlightened' but still be depressed or jealous or riddled with psychological desire. Egocentric emotions are extremely subtle operations of one's thought processes, and are related to one's thoughts about the past and the future. They do not exist in a *jnani*, because all self-centred mental activities have ceased in his or her mind.

It is true that enlightenment is the simplest thing, and that a person looks no different after achieving it. He remains simple and unaffected. We unfortunately tend to mistake simplicity for spiritual shallowness. But a sage is at once extremely simple and very profound. He has swallowed the entire universe of names and forms, and revels in supreme unfathomable peace. The state of such a sage cannot even be guessed at. His supreme Peace is known to him alone. This is why it is ludicrous when modern 'gurus' give certificates of enlightenment to their disciples, endorsing them as teachers. Someone who needs the confirmation of others regarding his own enlightenment is surely the king of ignorance, not wisdom; he seeks name and fame, not the welfare of suffering sentient beings. Both the so-called 'gurus' and their misguided disciples who advertise their 'enlightenment', are bereft of wisdom, because their focus is on worldly gain.

Enlightenment is a *total* shift in one's outlook on the world. One's experience of Reality moves from *thinking* that it exists externally (objectively), to *experiencing* it subjectively (internally). As a consequence, one's experience does not need any external proof at all. How foolish it is to think that this subjective climax of perfection needs objective confirmation! When Ramana was enlightened he knew nothing about 'Brahmajnana', let alone what the word 'Brahman' meant. It was only many years later, when spiritual books such as

² That part of one's karma which is to be worked out in this life.

Vivekachudamani were read to him by his devotees, that he discovered that what they described was his own experience. His experience had been so comprehensive, so all-embracing, that he had not even tried to know whether others had had the same experience.

Nowadays 'enlightened' people are sprouting like mushrooms, in every nook and corner of the world. Anyone with a quick, shrewd intellect, and with no sense of guilt about exploiting others, can claim 'I am enlightened' and thereafter do very well. In the name of 'freedom' such pseudo-gurus defend their abnormal or immoral behaviour, and easily prove that 3=4, while their blinkered followers blindly rationalize their behaviour. In sharp contrast to these antics, the enlightened sage abides in unbroken awareness, sublimely tranquil. He knows that he has no death. It is only when we come to truly understand that *we continue to exist even when the body and the world are absent*, (as in the state of deep, dreamless sleep), that we will know that we too, like the sage, are deathless and eternal.

I must admit that I am not enlightened, and that whatever I have written above regarding enlightenment is merely what I have understood from reading the teachings of sages like Bhagavan and Nisargadatta Maharaj. So nobody needs to accept what I say as it is second-hand information. If desire still arises in our minds, then our peace is not continuous, and this means that our insight is very limited. We must try to abide in a state of unbroken stillness — this is the truest sadhana in Advaitic practice. There is one danger here, however. Because there is no further effort involved once one has entered this state of dynamic peace, this stage can give one the illusory feeling that one is enlightened. One must guard against this delusion.

The idea that Advaita does not relate to day-to-day life

Many Advaitins develop an aversion to the world, because they have heard, again and again, that it is 'unreal'. But Bhagavan never for a moment asked us to give up the world, or to seek seclusion. He was very serious when he repeatedly dissuaded his devotees from seeking secluded lives. Why did he do this? Because once you understand what 'stillness' actually is, the world and worldly activities become immense

opportunities to turn your attention to the Self. As we become more acquainted with this extraordinary 'stillness' we will realize that it is always available to us, it exists in every moment, even in the midst of people and activities. 'Life in relationship' always brings up some emotions. But when an emotion arises within us, this dynamic stillness cleans it away. Our emotions have no ground to stand on, when faced with this stillness. It may take us some time to purify our deepest and strongest emotions. Often, we will find that we have been carried away by them. But this does not matter, because our Heart tells us that it is merely a question of time before we transcend them. The kind of brooding that we were addicted to, and the added suffering that this created for us, will not arise, even though we may suffer at the moment of feeling an emotion. Experiencing this process of purification gives us immense confidence.

Once this understanding comes to us, we will not run away from the world, declaring that it is merely a dream. When we say that the world is a dream, we need to understand that it is unreal only if it is perceived as an inherently-existing object. But it is not unreal if it is seen as a changing, transient manifestation of the Real. Like us, in its true nature it is not different from Reality. If we perceive this, then contact with the world becomes an opportunity to experience the Self within the safety of our own dynamic stillness.

When it eventually dawns on us that we are that stillness which is present every moment, we will see that what obstructs our recognition of our true nature is our habitual emotions (*vasanas*). All of sadhana is meant solely to destroy these deluded mental responses. Reality itself does not need our sadhana, it is we who need sadhana. J. Krishnamurti, whose words are full of wisdom, throws much light on this. He stressed that life is 'movement in relationship', and that it gives us rich opportunities to observe our mental conditioning. This does not mean that we have to fight our emotions, or be depressed by them. If we understand this, the fragmentation of life in the name of sadhana comes to an end. We no longer alienate ourselves from life, recognizing that all of life is sacred. We no longer suffer by dividing our lives into conflicting sacred and profane spheres. All so-called obstacles to spiritual

progress are instead recognized as opportunities to let go and to be anchored within the silence of the heart. We no longer grasp at 'external objects' and therefore are no longer afraid of any aspect of life.

We therefore do not seek to run away from the world, or to opt for seclusion. We no longer feel that the teachings of Advaita are not relevant to daily life. We stop running away from our hidden emotions, which previously we were afraid to face, because they threatened our sense of inner security. So, instead of giving up an active life of work, because we mistakenly believe that engagement with the world is an obstacle to practice, we should ask ourselves whether we have really understood Sri Ramana. Is not our desire for seclusion merely an egocentric intellectual construct, which has more to do with our fears and desires, than with genuine sadhana? This is usually the case with those who say that worldly life is an obstacle to the search for the Self. Such an attitude shows a complete misunderstanding of what 'stillness' — or 'being still' — actually means in Bhagavan's teachings.

To conclude: sadhana in Advaita begins with various techniques to calm the mind. They all require mental effort. Then, somewhere along the line, one starts the practice of self-enquiry. Through this sadhana thoughts are repeatedly subdued and the state of effortless dynamic silence is repeatedly glimpsed. With diligent practice, the aspirant is taken to the state that Bhagavan summed up thus: 'Be still and know that I am God'. This Biblical quote, as Bhagavan pointed out, summarizes the very heart of Vedanta. By this method one realizes the truth of one's nature and also avoids mistakes in one's practice. ▲



ASHRAM ARCHIVES

A Parable

An Ancient Story and Its Moral

AS TOLD TO HIS DEVOTEES BY
BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

In sorting through the Ashram archives we occasionally come upon a rare treasure among the manuscripts yet to be catalogued. The following is one of them. It is attributed to Bhagavan who told the story to underline the fact that one glimpse of Self Realisation does not mean that one has attained permanent moksha, in fact one can continue to be deluded in spite of it.

A few centuries ago in South India there ruled a monarch under whose sway were several princes who controlled diverse vassal-states. Under this system the country flourished in peace.

One of the ruling princes though loyal to his monarch, studiously maintained his status of quasi-independence. Amongst the other princes he commanded the respect of all so that even the monarch grew jealous

of his position. This prince rarely visited his over-lord and all the machinations of the monarch to call him to his court proved futile.

On one occasion, however, the monarch contrived to bring to his court the chief minister of this ruling prince as he knew full well that if he could win him over, the ruling prince could also be brought under his direct control and influence. But the minister was the greatest diplomat of his day and was second to none in his loyalty to his master who, in fact, owed not a little of his position to the tact and skill of his minister.

The monarch thought that he had now the chance to get the ruling prince to his court. He induced or rather compelled the chief minister to send an urgent proposal to the ruling prince stating that his presence was immediately required. The monarch knew that the prince reposed his entire confidence in the minister and would directly come to the monarch's court. The minister was equally aware of the real motives of the monarch, but how could he refuse to comply with the request of the over-lord? He knew that there was little personal acquaintance between the monarch and the prince — the former could hardly recognize the latter — and that an urgent message from the chief minister himself to his master and that too, from the court of the monarch, would naturally have the desired effect and induce the prince to come.

As I told you, the minister was a great diplomat. While he appeared to the monarch to be quite willing to send the urgent message as desired, and knew full well that the prince would undoubtedly come as desired, he maintained that the prince would never come to the monarch's court, come what may. The monarch, however, could hardly believe it; for, how could the prince set at naught an urgent call from his trusted minister in whose advice he had implicit faith.

The message was couched in terms expressing the urgent nature of the call, as expressly desired by the monarch and sent by the minister. When the prince read it he surmised that some extraordinary circumstance must have arisen in order to induce the minister to set aside all precedents and invite him to the monarch's court; and so the king was proved right and the prince made haste to his court. Indeed,

so urgent was his departure that no time was spent even to make the necessary arrangements to bring his retinue as was normal on a formal visit.

The next morning the prince rode with but two attendants and travelled straight to the monarch's court. The audience could hardly believe their eyes. How could the prince, who never cared to attend the monarch's court, come now like this with no retinue and no formal reception arranged! Was it to insult the prince that no reception was accorded him and that none, in turn, were intimidated of his arrival? How would the monarch now receive the prince? How would the latter act when he realized that there was nothing really urgent but that he had been induced to come by a cunning trick of the monarch? The audience watched in anticipatory silence.

As the prince entered the hall, the minister rose in his seat and addressed him thus aloud, "What is the matter with the prince that he has sent you in his place? Pray, speak at once." Then turning to the monarch and without giving time for the prince to reply the minister said, "My Lord, no doubt the prince is unwell and he has sent my secretary, who will presently tell us all about it."

The prince was both astonished and angry at the unseemly conduct of his minister. It was inconceivable that the latter would fail to recognize him even though he was not in his royal robes? But quickly he regained his presence of mind and knew that the minister had purposely addressed him thus. It was now his turn to play his part, and he played it well too. He said, "The prince had an unhappy accident, while returning from a hunting party. He fell from the horse and had his arm fractured. But he saw the message and has sent me post-haste to convey the news." Turning to the monarch, the 'secretary' continued, "If your Highness be pleased, may my master, the minister, be released from any engagement your Highness might have fixed for him so that he may go back at once."

With such consummate skill did the minister and his 'secretary' play their parts that the monarch, who had briefly seen the prince but once, never even suspected that he had been outwitted. In the meanwhile, the audience which had sat in tense silence began to murmur

that the 'secretary' bore a close resemblance to the prince and that all the while they had mistaken him for the prince; but now they undertood the reason for the absence of a retinue.

The Moral

Though the sadhak might have had a glimpse of the *atman*, he should not give up the sadhana under the mistaken belief that he has realized the Self. He will deceive himself like the monarch, who momentarily did see the prince once before, but now under the peculiar circumstances which suggested false conclusions he failed to recognize what he did know, the identity of the person he saw but once only. The veil of *maya* is verily like that and it clouds the vision of the sadhak, at a very critical period of his sadhana.

May the sadhak deeply ponder over the moral of the story and bear it in mind. ▲

KEYWORD

Nan

Nan in Tamil means 'I', the individual, the subject who perceives the world and others as objects.

We are naturally and spontaneously conscious of ourselves without the mediation of thought. This fundamental sense of 'I' is not a thought as such. Pure being-consciousness is not determined by ideas or feelings.¹ Though it is nameless and formless, we call it 'I', and without it nothing can be known. In other words, apart from this inborn experience there is nothing which is separate. It is the one 'factor' which is indispensable and our entire existence is reliant upon it.

We are already removed from the pure subjectivity of being when we name it the Reality, the Heart or Self-realisation. This 'I' is unconditioned and free of anything external to itself that supposedly has authority to confirm its existence. We do not require a word or explanation or external authority to tell us that we exist! We simply 'know'.

The first thought that arises in our consciousness is the sense of 'I' which is identified with the body. The mind is a bundle of thoughts whose basis is this 'I-thought'. When the consciousness of 'I' is

¹ Interestingly, in refutation of Rene Descartes famous dictum, 'I think therefore I am', the modern Western philosopher J-P. Satre said, "The consciousness that says 'I am' is not the consciousness that thinks."

identified with an object (*upadhi*), the 'I am such and such' becomes a thought. That which shines alone as 'I-I' is not a thought, it is our being-consciousness. We conventionally call it Self but really it has no name. It is the true source of our existence. The more we focus our attention on this sense of 'I', the more the mind subsides. In the brightness of pure being self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*) is revealed.

We all seek to know and understand who we are. We think various thoughts much the same way we try on various clothes until we discover what is suitable for our purpose, and when we do find what is convenient we become habituated to them. So much so that we mistakenly assume the costume or the thoughts are an essential aspect of our nature. We may not think so but on investigation and reflection we can see the subtle bond which causes us to identify with something external to our essence, even the subtlest of thoughts, is peripheral to our true nature. The I-thought which identifies with an object already removes us from the Heart.²

The aim of self-enquiry is to 'know' that by which by everything else is known. The process of knowing implies a subject who knows. If we remain focused on the subject 'I' without the slightest intrusion of any other object including thought, that consciousness will pull us into the Heart where the pure consciousness shines free of all identification.³

What happens when we identify with our body? What is it which makes the body conscious? The physical body of itself is insentient. It has no independent consciousness and is dependent on 'something' to give it life. The physical body cannot be called our real nature because it does not exist in sleep when our consciousness is identified with a dream body. In other words, when we identify with a physical body it seems real but it disappears, and is therefore unreal, when we exist in

² "The reason why our sentient, percipient and thinking ego is met nowhere in our world picture can easily be indicated in seven words: because it is ITSELF that world picture. It is identical with the whole and therefore cannot be contained in it as part of it." Erwin Schrodinger, in R. Fischer, ed., *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Time*, New York Academy of Science, 1967, p. 16.

³ See *Atma Vidya*, v.3.

another state, for example, sleep. In the state of sleep, the dream world presents to us an individual with whom we identify as our self and who interacts with others in a seemingly real world.

In sleep, when I forcibly intrude on someone else then that person naturally reacts. I may feel sorry because the impact of my action may have been painful. Or perhaps I am attacked and feel the anxiety and anguish which accompanies the assault. Suddenly, I wake up to realise that these episodes were but dreams. What happened? Apparently there was my body which was solid and measurable; there was also somebody else who appeared tangible and there was the painful reaction. When we wake up that entire world which was populated with individuals turns out to be false.

Bhagavan confirms our conclusions: "Just as the spider spins out the thread from within itself and again withdraws it into itself, so the mind projects the world from within itself and absorbs it into itself."⁴ This is a subject for deep contemplation. Let us say that tonight when we go to sleep we are chased by a dream tiger. In spite of all our study and analysis of the waking and dream state, we will run for our life. Why? Because the knowledge that it is only a dream will not be available to us during dream. If we knew the 'I' was but a dream, we could stand still and allow the dream tiger to attack our dream body. What would we lose if our dream body is killed or mutilated?

Bhagavan has often pointed to the similarity between the waking and sleep states. He says this world we perceive during waking, including oneself as an individual, is also false like a dream — call it a waking dream if you like. Because of our lack of insight, we fail to see the unreality of the world and therefore take it to be real and act in the world as if it were real.⁵ Bhagavan has said that the one difference between the waking state and the dream state is the memory (*chitta*) in the former which holds together the episodes in the waking state

⁴ *Who Am I?* The English translation of *Nan Yar?* by Om Sadhu and Michael James, *Path of Sri Ramana, Part One*, p.149-50. Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, 1990.

⁵ *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 2, Chapter 3, 'The Jnani and the World', pp.46-53. Sri Ramanasramam, 2000.

like a string so that we appear to be one coherent 'I' to whom multivarious things happen.

Each night when we enter a state of deep sleep there is no awareness of our body or mind. But as soon as we awaken, our mind begins to function and we think 'I am this body'. With this identification the external world arises automatically through the five senses and just like the spider of which Bhagavan spoke, we create our individual world. If we reflect deeply enough we would understand that if we are composed of nothing but thought we would not even know that we are thinking. We would be like a machine that computes but is unaware because there is no 'centre' which can see and understand the calculations but is not a calculation itself. In the same respect, when we dream we are so identified with the dreamer that we would not know we are dreaming.

It is here we should be careful to discriminate between experience and analysis. When we are dreaming, the experience is as real as that in the waking state. When we 'wake up' we realise those dream experiences are but a dream and have no reality. In the analysis after waking, we exercise thought to confirm our understanding but this is already second-hand information. If we cannot wake up during the dreams in sleep, how then can we wake up in the midst of this waking dream?

'Body, senses, mind, breathing and the darkness of ignorance seen during deep sleep are all inert and unreal.'⁶

When the understanding (*jnana*) dawns that I am present always when the body, senses and other objects appear as well as when they disappear, there is the revelation that I am totally free and not dependent upon any of them for my existence. I am self-radiant awareness. There is nothing apart from myself to know myself. Knowing myself is actually being 'I'. Self knowledge is not like a subject knowing objects; it is knowing and being at once. Bhagavan reiterates: 'Being the Self is knowing the Self since 'I am' is nondual. This is Self abidance (*thanmaya nishtai*).'⁷ ▲

⁶ *Upadesa Undiyar*, v.22.

⁷ *Upadesa Undiyar*, v.26.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's Commentary

Verse Eleven

S. RAM MOHAN

11. How can knowledge of outside objects, which comes to one who is without right knowledge of the knower, be true knowledge? It is only ignorance. When the truth of him (the ego) in whom both knowledge and ignorance exist, is known, then both knowledge and ignorance cease.

Commentary

The 'I' that thinks " 'I know the objects in the world" (which is the ego as we have seen in the previous verses), is a false consciousness and is just as unreal as the proverbial barren woman's son. The means of right-awareness of the Self, which is deliverance (*mukti*), is the quest (*atma vichara*) for the source of this ego. He who does not know the Self by this quest does not know himself. Such a person looks upon this false self as himself. This is the primal ignorance and he is incapable of knowing the truth of the world. Only the sage, who knows the real Self aright, can know the world as it really is.

Someone asked Bhagavan, “How is it possible to say that the world which is being directly perceived is unreal?” Bhagavan replied, “This world is laughing at you saying: ‘How can you, not knowing even your own real Self, know me aright?’” It will be shown in verse 18 that the manner of the ignorant man’s knowing the world, and that of the sage, are diametrically opposite. The ignorant one disregards the *Brahman* (the substratum of the world-appearance) and, seeing only the superimposed names and forms, believes them to be real and thus is entangled in *samsara*. For the sage the substratum alone shines. Thus the sage is free; he has no bondage.

The ignorant or unconscious person is composed of two categories of ignorance. The first is what he himself calls ignorance; the other is what he calls knowledge. Both these must be eradicated. It is not enough to get rid of the ignorance alone. It is also necessary to get rid of this so called knowledge. It is a grave error to suppose that one must get rid of what is called ignorance, yet retain that which is called knowledge, because ultimately this knowledge is also ignorance. This combination of knowledge and ignorance is a dyad, and hence inseparable.

Both these categories of ignorance (*avidya*) are non-existent in the experience of the sages on the dawn of the real Self. This is the meaning of the last sentence in the verse. Thus it follows that in the state of *jnana* neither knowledge as we know it nor ignorance, survives.

The last sentence of the verse can also be translated thus: ‘When the truth of him, the ego, in whom subsist both knowledge and the external object of knowledge is known, then both knowledge and the object-knower, that is, *ignorance*, cease.’ In this sense the meaning is that in the supreme state not only knowledge, but also the objects of knowledge are absent. This is also consistent with the teaching that the ego is the basis and source of the mind, the knower and of the objects of knowledge — when the truth of the ego, the self, is known, then both mind and world vanish. This is in accordance with Bhagavan’s teaching as a whole.

Verses 9 to 11 of the *Isa Upanishad* also deals with the same topic: “They enter into blinding darkness who worship *avidya*(ignorance); into still greater darkness as it were, do they enter who do delight in

vidya (knowledge). One result, they say is obtained by *vidya* and another result, they say is obtained by *avidya*; this have we heard from the wise ones who explained to us. He, who knows both *vidya* and *avidya* together, overcomes death through *avidya* and experiences immortality by means of *vidya*.”¹

Vidya refers to the knowledge of the Self, the changeless reality. *Avidya* refers to the knowledge of the non-self, the changing world of phenomena. However, both are one *Brahman*. ‘The Self alone is all this’.² A person of the world usually knows only one of these two — knowledge of the phenomenal world. As Sir James Jeans says, “The knowledge of the not-Self which man had laboriously built up turns out in the end to be only a form of learned ignorance. It is only knowledge of passing shadows.” The *Isa Upanishad* mentions that it is necessary to cultivate both an understanding of *avidya* and *vidya*.

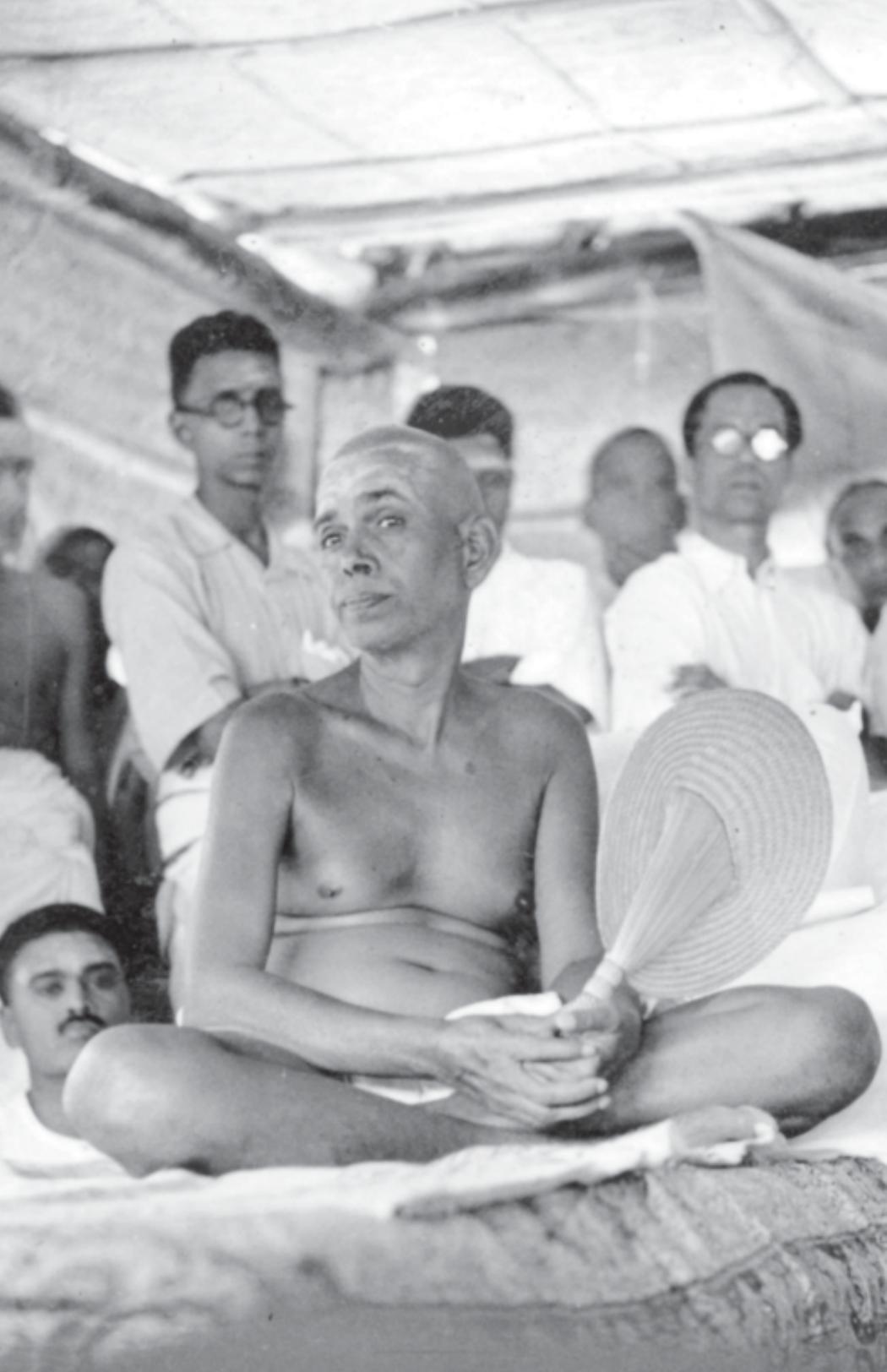
The world is unreal in itself because it is a projection of our ignorance. But when viewed as *atman*, it is real. The study of either ignorance or knowledge leads to darkness when dealt with in isolation. Both *Brahman* and world are basically one, not two. *Avidya* offers the world as a Self-sufficient reality. *Vidya* affirms God as that which is other, as a distant, seemingly unreachable reality. When true knowledge arises, this hiatus is overcome. True knowledge transcends knowledge of both, of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. It is both immanent and transcendent.

Self is the ground for both objective knowledge and self-knowledge (*adhyatma*). Nescience or *avidya* also has its roots in the Self. Hence the Upanishads instruct the aspirant to have an integral knowledge of both.

If both knowledge and ignorance are terminated, will only nothingness remain? Bhagavan explains in the following verse that what remains is not nothingness but that in this state, the sole survivor is the real Self who is pure consciousness. Bhagavan also clarifies that in this State where the dyad of knowledge and ignorance is absent, the right knowledge, which is the experience of the Self, is not an act of the Self, but is his very nature. ▲

¹ Translation by Swami Ranganathananda.

² *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.25.2.



Encounters with Bhagavan

Part Two

Constant Meditation and Release

T. R. KANAKAMMAL

Once an earnest seeker came, prostrated in all humility to Bhagavan and asked him:

“Bhagavan has said that the real nature of the Self¹ can be attained only by constant *dhyana*. But how is it possible for one like me saddled with official responsibilities and the management of household affairs? If a major part of one’s life is spent managing these, where is there time for *atma vichara*, much less uninterrupted *dhyana*? What is the way out? I beseech Bhagavan to enlighten me on this.”

Looking at him compassionately, Bhagavan said:

“Suppose you leave your house with the intention of coming to the Ashram and on the way you meet a friend. You greet him, exchange pleasantries and then take leave of him, proceeding to the Ashram

¹ *Atma Swarupa*.

while your friend goes his way. Now you don't go away with your friend but rather continue toward the Ashram, do you not? The thought of coming to the Ashram is so fixed in your mind that whomsoever you happen to meet on the way is spoken to in the proper way and parted with in order that you may fulfil your original intention. Likewise, if the mind is deeply engaged in meditation after doing whatever has to be done, the mind will return to meditation. By engaging the mind before starting work and after finishing it, even while working, it will automatically acquire the ability to do the necessary while inhering in its natural state. In the course of time this becomes in-built, habitual and natural, and one no longer feels the lack of being engaged in constant meditation."

* * *

Another time in the Jubilee Hall, a Telugu devotee came to Bhagavan and complained about the *pallavi* of *Atma Vidya* where there is mention of release being easy²:

"O Bhagavan, how can someone such as I get release? Release may be easy for one like you but how is it possible for an ordinary person like me?"

Bhagavan said, "If it is easy for me how can it be difficult for you?"

"But you are Bhagavan, I am just an ordinary man!"

Bhagavan then said, "If you were to have to carry something too heavy for you to pick up, what would you do?"

"I would seek the help of others," the devotee responded.

"In the same way, seek the help of the Divine or simply surrender to Him," Bhagavan said.

² 'Lo, very easy is Self Knowledge, lo, very easy indeed' are the words that make up the *pallavi* or refrain of this poem on Self-knowledge. In April 1927, Muruganar had written these lines, echoing a well-known Tamil poem that begins with the words: 'Lo, very difficult is self-knowledge'. Muruganar gave Bhagavan this recast version and asked him to elaborate. Bhagavan's response was the five-verse poem in question.

"That is one thing that is just impossible for me. Today I will say I have surrendered; but the next day my ego will rise up and dance with abandon."

Bhagavan replied, "In that case, do one thing, pray to the Him to help you surrender. If you cannot do even that, then simply suffer what comes your way!"

* * *

One day, the attendant Venkataratnam was accompanying Bhagavan up the hill. At one place on the path from the Ashram to Skandashram, there is a steep stretch with steps. While climbing down Bhagavan would often manoeuvre this inclined portion by bracing himself on a big rock, planting his stick firmly against the ledge and descending slowly. One day some devotees evidently asked a young boy to wait at this place and approach Bhagavan as he passed, taking hold of his feet. The youngster said to him, "Bhagavan, if you do not grant me *mukti*, I will not let go of your feet." Apparently the devotees were hiding themselves behind the nearby bushes. Bracing himself with his stick, Bhagavan said, "*Adei*, it is *you* who are in a position to give *mukti* because if you don't let go of my feet, I am going to fall and attain complete release in this very moment". At these words the boy became frightened and took to his heels. Astonished by this strange happening Venkataratnam asked who the boy could have be and what this unusual episode could mean. Bhagavan's ready reply was, "Oh! It was all staged."

How could anyone ever succeed in hoodwinking Bhagavan?

* * *

A devotee once asked why the impure world of *maya* came forth from pure Brahman. Bhagavan said everything is pure. It is only the mind that comes in between that is impure. ▲



The Nature of Meditation

JONATHAN BADER

This series of articles on Sankara has been adapted by the author from his Meditation in Sankara's Vedanta published by Aditya Prakshan Publications, 2/18 Ansari Road, Delhi. Their email address is contact@bibliaimpex.com

Lately meditation has attracted considerable interest in both popular and scholarly circles. Yet surprisingly little attention has been given to establishing a precise definition of meditation. While we cannot expect specialised definitions of complex terms in standard dictionaries, they do indicate the prevailing conventional understandings, and may, for that reason, also reflect some of the difficulties in the comprehension of those terms. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines the verb 'meditate' as, to "exercise the mind in (esp. religious) contemplation". This raises some immediate questions. To what extent are meditation and contemplation equivalent? Where 'meditation' has a religious connotation, does it vary substantially from one tradition to another?

These questions may serve as our starting point in establishing a working definition of 'meditation'. The approach here will be threefold: (i) an etymological analysis of 'meditation' and 'contemplation', (ii) a selective survey of the application of these terms within the context of mystical theology, and (iii) a look at Hindu meditation (a) as it is presented in the early Upanishads, and (b) as it is later synthesized in the *Yogasutra*.

Meditation and Contemplation

The term 'meditation' can be traced back to the Indo-European root *med*, whose primary significance is that of 'measuring'.¹ In Sanskrit, for example, the cognate root *ma* means "measure, mete out, mark off".² The Greek term *meletao*, which derives from *med*, connotes 'meting out'. More specifically, *meletao* signifies "attend to, study, practise, exercise".³ Its Latin cognate, *meditor*, is virtually synonymous. Originally *meditor* meant 'exercise' in a rather general sense, but the term was later restricted to the designation of a mental or spiritual exercise.⁴ It is from this Latin term that 'meditation' is derived.

'Contemplation', in turn, is from the Latin *templum*. The earliest use of *templum* was to designate the space marked out by the augur for the practice of divination: "A quadrilateral space drawn out by the augur in the sky and on the earth, within which he gathers and interprets omens."⁵ By extension it came to denote a place consecrated to the gods, a temple. In this sense, *templum* is quite close to the Greek *temenos*, a sacred enclosure. The manner in which the enclosure was marked out is suggested by the Indo-European root *tem*, 'to cut', from which both terms are derived. Insofar as the

intersecting lines marked out by the augur appear to divide and define what is simply an open space, his activity involves a 'cutting'. This is not merely 'cutting off', but rather marking out a space within a greater space. The intention of the augur is to define the link between heaven and earth. The link appears in the form of celestial omens, and it is the reflection on the meaning of these that constitutes contemplation. Elemire Zolla vividly describes this ancient process:

"A ritual should first of all separate a space, a moment from time. The holy spot should be cut off from the everyday time of ordinary space: set apart ... The ancient seer traced a circle on the spot that had 'all room within'. On the circle he marked four points: the cross of the four moments of time. The seer would draw other patterns on the ground until he stood over an emblem and map of the cosmos ... He would then turn towards the star whose power had manifested itself. He might place a pebble, or a twig, or a flower on the point of the circle where the line from the star to himself had intersected it. In that direction he would steady his gaze. Whatever crossed that line was a word from the star to him. He would bet that it was omen. In awe and wonderment he had marked off that space and time. He was wrapt in contemplation, and contemplation had shown him the sign."⁶ This also reflects the development the term *contemplatio* has undergone: from 'cutting', and 'marking out', to 'gazing', and 'contemplation'.

The term *contemplatio* was understood by the scholastics to be synonymous with the Greek *theoria* and was employed to render that term into Latin. The primary meaning of *theoria* is 'viewing', 'beholding'.⁷ The only difference between these terms is that whereas *contemplatio* bears a specifically religious connotation, *theoria* has a more general application. Plato brings out the contemplative connotation of *theoria*:

⁶ Elemire Zolla, "Traditional Methods of Contemplation and Action", in *Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action*, ed. Yusuf Ibish and Peter Lamborn Wilson. Tehran, 1977, pp. 49-50.

⁷ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. Oxford, revised edition, 1925-40.

¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions and G. W. S. Friedrichsen. Oxford, 1966.

² Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (repr. Delhi, 1974).

³ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. Oxford, revised edition, 1925-40.

⁴ A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Latine, Histoire ties Mots*. Paris, 4th edition, 1967.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 681.

“But if it were given to man to gaze on beauty’s very self — if it were given to man to see the heavenly beauty face to face, would you call his ... an unenviable life whose eyes had been opened to the vision, and who had gazed upon it in true contemplation until it had become his own forever?”⁸

From this it seems that *theoria* is a special kind of gazing, that culminates in an intuitive understanding. Plato in *Symposium* 210-211, explains a method of contemplation which begins with the observation of beauty in a single form or body. By a gradual process of abstraction the physical aspects of beauty are left aside so that the soul’s supramundane beauty may be considered. Similarly, there is a progression from sensory perception to intellectual perception. Ultimately there is direct perception of the highest order which reveals the very Form of beauty itself.

Since the time of Aristotle, a distinction has been drawn between *bios theoretikos*, the contemplative life, the way of ‘seeing’, and *bios praktikos*, the active life, the way of doing. Meditation and contemplation are, of course, components of the *bios theoretikos*. Nevertheless, ‘meditation’ implies activity. Although *meditari*, the Latin cognate of *melete*, denotes a specifically mental or spiritual form of exercise, its connotation is clearly one of activity. For this reason, meditation must be linked with praxis, while contemplation can only be associated with *theoria*.

Although ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplation’ derive from roots which imply a sense of ‘measurement’, the two terms have certainly developed their own distinctive connotations. Meditation entails a deliberate practice. It is a rigorous mental exercise whose aim is a clear perception of truths of a religious or metaphysical nature. Contemplation, on the other hand, is *not* an activity. It is a receiving, a beholding, or an intuitive perception, of the truth which was sought in meditation. Nevertheless, the interrelationship of the two should

⁸ Symposium 211 E, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Michael Cairns. Bollingen Series LXXI; New York, 1963, p. 563.

not be overlooked. Contemplation is the corollary of meditation. They are inseparable links in the contemplative process. Hence, ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplation’ are best understood as complementary terms.

It has become established usage to apply ‘meditation’ rather than ‘contemplation’ in discussing Indian religions, although the reasons for this are not clear. The Sanskrit term *dhyana*, for example, is usually translated by ‘meditation’. One scholar who stands apart from this ‘convention’ is Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He consistently renders *dhyana* by ‘contemplation’, on the understanding that the verbal root *dhyai*, from which *dhyana* derives, is equivalent to *dhi*, ‘to perceive’ or ‘to think’.⁹ Mayrhofer agrees the two roots are cognate,¹⁰ as does Gonda who demonstrates at great length that *dhi* signifies ‘vision’.¹¹ Coomaraswamy logically extends the correspondence of these roots to the nominal forms *dhyana* and *dhi*. In indicating the significance of these terms for the creative process, he maintains that traditionally the artist began with an “intellectual operation”, a contemplation by which he ‘saw’ the required form of the work to be done. He cites passages from the Vedas where a chariot or an altar is said to be “put together by means of a contemplation (*dhiya*)”.¹² Because they connote a supramundane perception, Coomaraswamy equates *dhi* and *dhyana* with *theoria* and *contemplatio*. Although a good case could be made for taking up his rendering, in this study *dhyana* will be translated by ‘meditation’. Firstly, it is more convenient to follow what is by now an established usage. Secondly, ‘meditation’ seems preferable insofar as it is not suggestive of a particular religious tradition.

⁹ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Symbolism of the Dome”, in *Coomaraswamy 1: Selected Papers*, Traditional Art and Symbolism, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton, 1977), p. 426. This was first published in 1938.

¹⁰ Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* (3 vols.; Heidelberg, 1956-66), vol. 1.

¹¹ J. Gonda has devoted an entire monograph to an examination of the term *dhi*: *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*. (The Hague, 1963), especially p.289 ff.

¹² Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*

Even without undertaking a comparative examination of meditation in Christian and Hindu traditions, many points will be seen to agree. The intention here is not to notice the obvious parallels, nor the differences, but rather to provide a clearer picture of meditation than has been previously available. To summarise what has been covered so far, and as an introduction to the Sanskrit sources, it will be useful to offer at this point a provisional definition of meditation: *the concentration of the mind on a particular theme or object in preparation for the direct intuition of truth.* ▲

SILENCE

RADHEY SHIAM

Silence, a cosmic reservoir,
Brightens the cosmic conscience,
Silence, a wordless wonder,
Generates energy to work more.

Silence focuses on inner man,
Source of universal love;
Melts away all sorts of delusions,
Reveals all secrets of life.

Silence kisses the human soul,
In meditative pensive moments;
Unlocks doors of eternal palace,
Leads one to the ultimate truth.

Silence is the voice of God,
The unsaid but truly meaningful,
Silence, a song of the Absolute,
A key to eternal delight. ▲

Letters to Friends

Part Two

SRI SADHU OM

How to Be

Not attending to anything but Self will be made possible by often feeding one's memory with the following ideas along the line of Self-enquiry.

a) When sleep or death comes, the whole universe and my life in it disappear. Death can come at any time. After that what is it that remains? 'I' and nothing else. Therefore why should I think of any thing other than 'I AM', the eternal reality? Though I love and think of other things, one day (on death) they will leave me! That which never leaves me is 'I AM'. Moreover, everything else that I love, I love only for myself, so my love towards myself is more than my love towards anything else! If 'I AM' is thus so much dearer thing to me, why should I not always remember and be as 'I AM'. Would it not be wise for me to keep my attention on what I love most?

b) My Guru Sri Bhagavan, has said in *Who am I?*, “Remaining firmly in Self-abidance (*atma-nishta*), without giving even the least room to the rising of any thought other than the thought of Self (*atma-chintana*), is surrendering oneself to God”. My Guru’s words are an unfailing authority. Therefore, if I try to keep my attention on the feeling of ‘I AM’, that itself is surrender too and therefore all gods and goddesses will be fully satisfied.

Lord Krishna also recommends in Chapter 6, verse 25 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *sanais sanai chinta yat*. By means of an extremely courageous intellect (the power of discrimination), make the mind motionless little by little; fix the mind firmly in Self and never think of any other thing. Therefore, I am doubly assured that attending to Self alone is tapas, yajnas, yogas, and upasanas. Therefore let me always have Self-attention!

Ananya chintana can be practised in two ways, namely (i) making efforts not to think of anything except our Guru, Sri Bhagavan; (ii) making efforts not to attend to any second and third person objects but only to Self. The former is bhakti marga and the later is jnana marga.

Bhakti Marga

Not thinking of anything but Sri Bhagavan will be made possible by often feeding one’s memory with the following ideas along the line of bhakti marga.

a) See the world, how many people are suffering in so many different ways. Some are born blind, deaf or disabled, some lack mental growth, some are poor below the poverty line and some are diseased. When the surroundings are in such misery, see my position. How much better does Sri Bhagavan place me. Is it not due to His abundant kindness towards me? Above all, how gracious He is by enabling me to think about His greatness. Many people, even in well-to-do positions, are not given to know of His grace but I am reminded about it. Therefore, it is my sole duty to remember always my Giver, the Lord. I may even avoid thoughts of His Gifts, and remember only Him, the Giver of them.

b) My Guru Sri Bhagavan, has said in *Who am I?* that however much burden we throw on God, He bears all of it. Since the one supreme power (*parameswara shakti*) is performing all activities, why should we, without yielding our self to it, constantly think, ‘I should act in this way, I should act in that way’? When we know that the train is bearing all the burdens, why should we who travel in it, instead of placing our small luggage in it and being happily at ease, suffer by bearing it (our luggage) on our own head? So, When He is ever working and thinking vigilantly for my welfare, why should I think unnecessarily?

Moreover, even Sri Bhagavan Krishna has said in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 9, verse 22, *ananya chinta vaham yaham*. That is, “For those who are ever devoted to Me and worship Me alone without thinking even in the least of what-is-other, I ever bear the burden of their life.” Therefore, let me not have any more thought even for my living in this life. He has assured that He will look after me, if I think only of Him. When I am thus doubly assured (by both Bhagavan Ramana and Bhagavan Krishna) that He will look after me, why should I think of anything else?

Thus, along the above said lines one should discriminate often. *Manasi vichintaya varam varam* (again and again think over this), says Adi Shankara in *Bhaja Govindam*. Such strong reflection (*manana*) alone will bestow strength to abide in ‘I AM’.

Mantras and Initiation

All mantras except ‘I-I’ are directed towards to some god, goddess, or something other than the doer of the japa. Therefore, to be initiated they require an agent other than the Self with the requisite power. But the mantra ‘I-I’ — though it is called by the term of mantra it is not a mantra, but a simple recollection of Self-awareness — is simply another way to turn the attention towards one’s Being. That is, it is nothing but the process of Self-attention or Self-enquiry. Hence, there is no need of any agent outside to initiate It to anyone. ▲



A Special Darshan

SHARADA BHANU

Even though the avatar of Rama was finite, Hanuman was immortal, *a chiranjivi*. “I am not really going away,” Rama told his devotee, “Am I not enshrined in your heart for ever?”

“That is why I live,” replied Hanuman. Rama smiled and said, “I will return in time to come and in another avatar. You will have my darshan then.”

“Yes Lord, but I would have it in this form as yourself whom I know, and with Sita Devi,” implored Hanuman. And because the lord loves to satisfy the yearnings in the hearts of devotees, he agreed.

Later in his avatar as Krishna, the Lord had not forgotten his words to his bhakta and judged it to be time for his old promise to be fulfilled. He decided he would also use the occasion to administer a small lesson

Dr. Sharada, long time devotee, is doing her doctoral dissertation on myth and children’s stories in the light of Advaita at the University of Madras.

to two people very close to him: his brother Balarama, who prided himself on his physical strength and his wife Sathyabama, who was vain and self-important.

“Brother, I ask a small favour from you,” he said to Balarama. “There is a monkey praying on the banks of the Yamuna. He is a faithful servant and an old friend to whom I owe a great deal. Could you fetch him here for me?”

“Why do you need to see this monkey,” asked Balarama, yawning.

“He needs to see me. I promised I would meet him quite a long time ago. Would you see to this brother?”

“I’ll send some of my personal guards,” said Balarama.

“Brother do you think they will be able to do this job? Don’t you think you should go yourself? This is no ordinary monkey. He is the bravest of the brave, very wise and the most faithful...”

“Come, Krishna, a monkey is just a monkey. And let’s not be ridiculous either. I should think seasoned Yadava warriors would be able to haul one monkey here, right? Just instruct them where he is to be found and they will do the rest.”

Krishna gave the directions and a small army of Yadava warriors departed. They came back some days later, in bad shape. Their clothes were torn and bespattered, their weapons missing, bodies bruised and faces crestfallen. It took them a while to speak and their tale was somewhat garbled.

“Huge monkey; wouldn’t come; said he didn’t know any Krishna; we tried force; he got angry; threw boulders large as a house; ran for our lives.”

Krishna sighed. He went up to Balarama and said plaintively, “Brother, your guard has returned and without the monkey.”

“What happened,” asked Balarama. “Couldn’t they find him?”

“Oh, they found him all right; they couldn’t persuade him to come. They’re complaining that he threw stones.”

Balarama swelled with rage. “Incompetent idiots! I’ll kill them. Threw stones! The fools. Trained warriors unable to handle a monkey! I’ll pound them into pulp.”

“Yes brother, but would it not be a waste of precious time? While we discipline our slack fighters the monkey may simply leave.”

“I’ll go myself,” said Balarama shortly.

“I think that would be wise,” said Krishna smiling sweetly. “This really is no ordinary monkey.” Balarama snorted.

He arrived at the banks of the Yamuna, under a serene night sky, to find an average sized monkey deep in prayer beside a small temple.

“Here you, wake up; Krishna wants to see you,” he said prodding the monkey.

The monkey opened a cold eye. “Krishna? Which Krishna? What Krishna? Never heard of him. How dare you disturb me? Who are you?”

“I am the son of Vasudeva, the brother of Krishna, Balarama the prince of...”

The prince got no further. The monkey emitted a tremendous roar of rage, stood up and suddenly he grew larger and larger till he seemed the size of a hill. In a voice of thunder the monkey said, “Insolent rogue! How dare you call yourself by a name like that! Bala-Rama! Do you fancy you are stronger than the one Rama, the divine hero who conquered Lanka and slew Ravana?”

The next thing Balarama knew was that he was sailing through the air, describing a neat arc before he splashed into the river, feet foremost. When he crawled out the monkey was so frightening a figure, his huge head towering against the tree tops that Balarama found himself unable to so much as stand without shaking, let alone grope for his weapons which were somewhere scattered over sea and shore. When the monkey thumped his chest and stepped towards him, Balarama’s courage failed and he fled.

Krishna listened with deep sympathy when Balarama returned with his sad story.

“Monkey threw you? Terrible. I hope you aren’t hurt. So sorry to have given you all this trouble. But I still need to see this monkey. Shall we handle it differently? Supposing you go up to Hanuman and tell him... What? Yes, he is Hanuman. Surely it was obvious? I didn’t tell you? I must have forgotten. But I did mention this was no ordinary monkey, didn’t I? Now just tell Hanuman Rama wants to see him. I think he’ll come. Will you just try that?”

The nervous Balarama made his way to Hanuman once again. Prostrating himself humbly, he spoke rather quickly. “Great son of Vayu we crave your presence in Dwaraka. Sri Rama wishes to see you.”

Hanuman exclaimed with wonder, “Sri Rama! See me! Why couldn’t you have said that earlier? A messenger from my Lord and I have insulted you? In the name of Rama, pardon me.”

So saying he picked up Balarama, put him on his shoulders and immediately made his way to Dwaraka.

In the meantime Krishna approached Sathyabama and told her of the divine guest he was expecting. “I have promised great Hanuman that I will give him darshan as Rama with Sita by my side,” he explained to Sathyabama. “He will be here in minutes. He has waited many ages already and should not be asked to wait any longer. So go now and come back as Sita — quickly.”

“Sita!” Sathyabama could hardly contain her delighted pride. To be so singled out among Krishna’s wives was a rare honour. So Krishna thought her equivalent to Sita Devi herself! “I can’t wait till Rukmini hears this. Now we’ll see who is the chief queen,” she thought.

She dashed into the inner apartments wondering what to wear.

“Sita – daughter of Janaka – queen of Ayodhya – girls! My silks and my jewels!” Dressed in garments stiff with gold work and dripping with jewels she returned to Krishna who gave her a blank stare.

“Sita! This! You must be crazy. Think Hanuman will recognize you? No chance. Go change and come back as Sita as quick as you can. He’s already at the gate. I can’t keep him waiting.”

Sathyabama ran back into her chamber, confused.

“Where did I go wrong? How else would Sita look? Oh, I’ve got it; exiled to the forest; captive in Lanka; prisoner at the Asokavana; girls my cottons! the rustic look! Yes that old rag will do; no jewels; my hair loose; the dishevelled air; yes that’s it.”

She looked quite a sight when she returned to Krishna who was pacing up and down impatiently in his chamber. Her husband took one look at her and clutched his hair.

“Sita! Are you crazy? Your own mother wouldn’t recognize you, let alone Hanuman.”

Sathyabama simply burst into tears and Krishna clicked his tongue. “I can’t wait any longer;” and then to the maids, “Quickly! Tell Rukmini to come as Sita.”

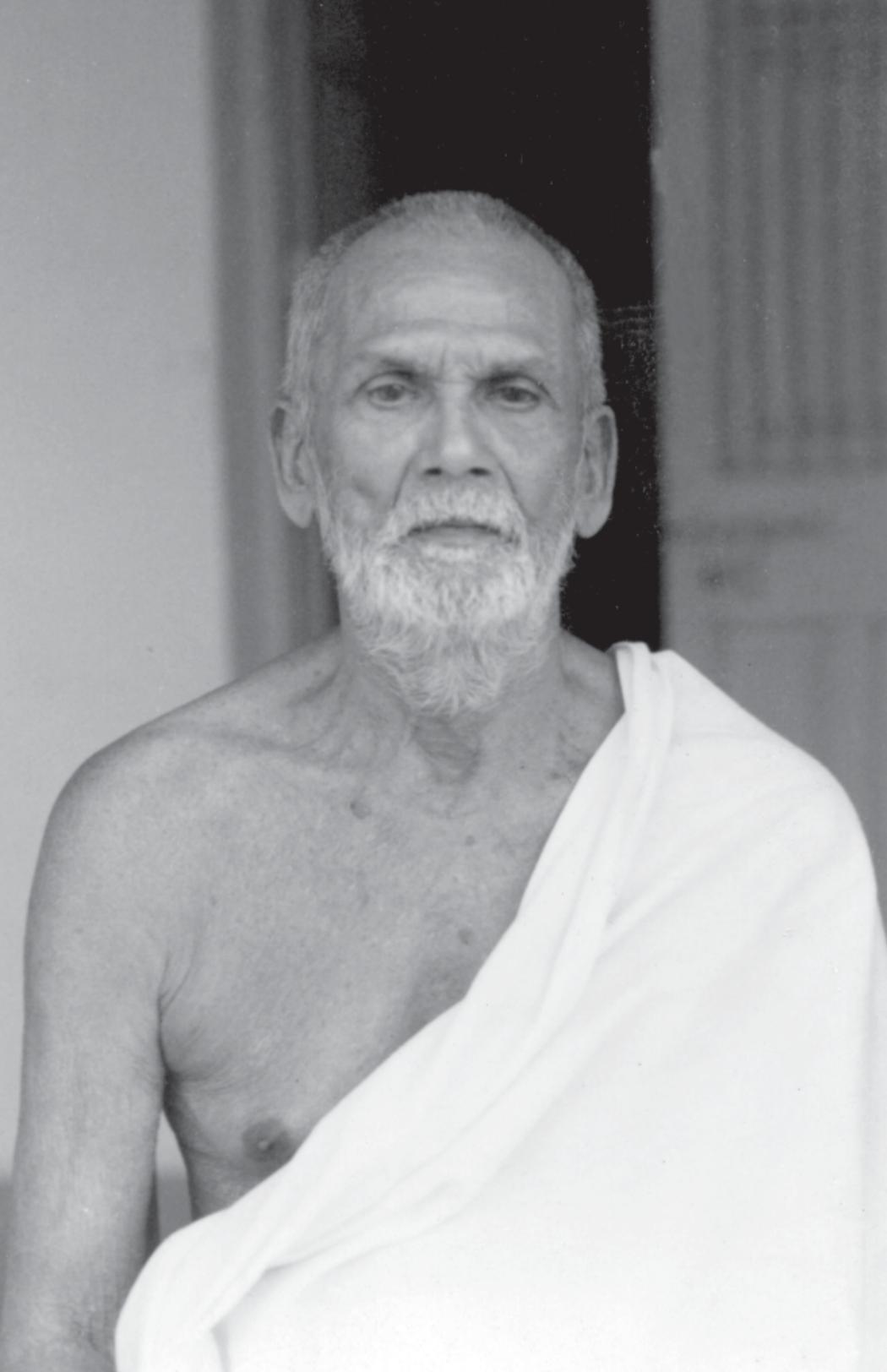
Krishna’s most gracious queen heard the message and her eyes dilated with joy. “Hanuman! The most ardent devotee of her lord! The *chiranjivi* who had been waiting from one avatar to another for a glimpse of his Lord’s face!”

She ran out of the apartment dressed exactly as she was. The sobbing, furious Sathyabama looked at her as she raced into Krishna’s chamber. Rukmini’s face was alive with joy, her whole being seemed to breathe a divine radiance.

“Lord... Hanuman, this greatest of devotees... let us see him at once,” she exclaimed.

Krishna stretched his hand to her with a smile and suddenly Sathyabama understood that being Sita was not a matter of clothes. Yes, this was how the spouse of Rama would have looked... a creature suffused with joy and concern and love...

Hanuman was ushered into the darbar hall where he found a pair that others knew as Krishna and Rukmini but one that he had no trouble in recognising to be Rama and Sita. On seeing his rapt joy, wild antics and tears of ecstasy, even hearts that were barren and shrivelled expanded in the presence of such bhakti. The Lord had kept his promise and two people had learnt a lesson. ▲



Ramana Puranam

Composed by Sri Ramana Maharshi
and Sri Muruganar

DAVID GODMAN

A complete English version of Ramana Puranam, translated and edited by Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman, is now available in the Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot.

In the 1920s and early 1930s Muruganar composed a series of poems that were published in 1933 under the title *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. Though the structure of this work parallels the *Tiruvachakam* of Manikkavachakar, its contents primarily praise Bhagavan rather than Siva. In the first poem of *Tiruvachakam*, which is entitled ‘Siva Puranam’, Manikkavachakar praises Siva in the most effusive and devotional manner. Since the initial published version of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* had had no introductory poem that corresponded to ‘Siva Puranam’, Muruganar decided that he ought to compose one for the next edition of the book. After writing about 200 lines of it in Bhagavan’s presence, sometime in 1938, a doubt arose in him about what he should call this particular poem. His initial idea was to entitle

it 'Ramana Puranam', but he was not fully convinced that this was appropriate. Deciding to postpone his decision on this matter, he put aside his papers and went out for a walk. When he returned, he was astonished to discover that Bhagavan had gone through the papers and written 'Ramana Puranam' at the top of every single page. Not only that, Bhagavan himself had personally completed the poem by adding more than 300 lines of his own.

When the next edition of the book was being prepared for the press, Muruganar inserted a footnote that indicated which lines were composed by him and which by Bhagavan. Kanakamma describes what happened next:

After correcting the proof, he [Muruganar] handed over the matter to Ramana. While going through it Ramana saw the footnote and remarked, 'Are only these [lines] written by Bhagavan?' Muruganar at once saw his error. Were not the earlier ones too a product of Ramana's grace? He at once prostrated to Bhagavan and with profuse tears said 'Nothing is written by me. Everything flows from your grace.' He then promptly deleted the footnote.¹

Though the more-than-three-hundred lines that Bhagavan composed for this work comprise a body of work that is longer than any of his other poetical compositions, the work has, until recently, languished in an undeserved obscurity.

In the early lines of the work Muruganar retells the story of how Manikkavachakar met Siva, his Guru, and received his grace, and he also includes passages in which he praises Bhagavan and gives details of how Bhagavan bestowed his own grace on him:

He it was who

as I suffered in the whirl [of birth and death]
forgetting the inescapable reality of the beginningless link
between the head [the *jiva*] and the foot [the Self],

¹ *Ramana's Muruganar*, pp. 12-13.

inspired in me, wretched cur that I was,
the madness of devotion.
He removed the defect of the wandering ego-mind,
shaped me into a comely form
through the purification [of my consciousness],
kindled the flame [of *jnana*] for my salvation's sake,
made me perform the fire-sacrifice of *jnana*
through the observance of devout austerities,
bathed me in his blissful gaze [at the sacrifice's end]
and became my Lord and Master.²

When one or more lines are indented, it indicates that a clause or a series of clauses are qualifying the subject or last word of the preceding unindented line. When the text reverts to the left-hand margin, there is a continuation from the previous unindented line.

Later in the poem, Muruganar reveals how his pleas for grace were fully met by Bhagavan:

The grace-bestowing word of our Lord,
who abides as the Self,
becomes the means through which our suffering will end.
Through his speech
that parts us from the suffering that parts us from him
he gives us answers that enable us
to be never parted from him.
May those words,
without ever leaving this foolish heart,
shine out clearly, even in the deepest darkness,
and abolish my bondage.³

Victory to the holy feet
of the [divine] Player,
who lovingly made me his own,
destroying my age-old *vasanas*

² Lines 3-8. 'Ramana Puranam' is a single verse of 540 lines.

³ Lines 86-90.

so that their powerful hold
was abolished!⁴

Towards the end of his own contribution Muruganar explains in a moving way how Bhagavan, residing as the real 'I' within all devotees, reveals himself to those who have the capacity to humble themselves before him by allowing their individual 'I's to subside into the Self:

He [Bhagavan] is the peerless Primal One,
the supreme peace of *mauna*,
who, merging as the Heart within the Heart,
with no trace of the thought 'I',
remains merged with each being
through its 'I',
existing and shining forth
in all the beings of the world
as their own Self-nature.

When the 'I' thought does not arise,
and I unite [as pure being] with him,
he remains merged with me,
shining out as my very own fullness.
However, the very moment
I raise my head [thinking 'I'],
to perceive His ancient [form]
He sees my oddness, scorns me,
and conceals Himself from me.

If I then bow down my head and die,
He flourishes within me,
shining his light as before.
Thus, the majesty of the Lord
will shine forth
only before the 'I' arises,

and after the 'I' subsides.
Who, then, will have the power
to tell of his greatness,
which can only be known
through the God-consciousness
in which the 'I' is absent,
and not through the awareness
in which the 'I' is experienced?⁵

When Bhagavan began his own contribution, he continued the narrative from Muruganar's perspective by composing a series of lines that described, in a first-person format, the spiritual journey that Muruganar himself had undergone, beginning long before the moment when Muruganar first came to Tiruvannamalai to meet him, and continuing on to the culminating moment in which Muruganar's mind dissolved in the presence of his Master:

You [Bhagavan] concealed yourself within me [Muruganar],
like the oil within a sesame seed,
so that your presence within me
could not be clearly discerned.
Because of that veiling known as ignorance
the truth within my heart
was cloaked entirely in deep darkness,
and in this condition
the mind somehow turned outwards.
Through the power of multiplicity
which deludes and shows the world
as the five sense perceptions,
my mind, which knows them [objectively] as 'that',
became bewildered,
and deeming them [the sense perceptions]
to be profitable, sought them.

⁴ Lines 125-26.

⁵ Lines 213-26.

That seeking, evolving itself into desire,
became the seed that engendered
the never-ending succession of births,
bringing into existence the great and evil tree
that is the illusion of birth [and death].

In my forgetfulness, I became a bird in that tree,
my mind confused by good and evil actions.
Looking around on all sides, in my perplexity,
I repetitively devoured its sweet and bitter fruits in vain,
experiencing again and again
unceasing suffering and enjoyment.
In this state of disgust, wherein there was not a trace
of clarity within my mind,
the king, who is my very life,
through his grace that is the truth,
free of the feelings of rejoicing and aversion,
appeared as a unique sage
in the city of Arunai
to save me from death,
worthless cur that I was,
and through his compassionate gaze
he revealed to me his holy lotus feet,
infusing me with an abundant, unending flood
of the ambrosia of being-consciousness
so that my mind became still.⁶

Before Muruganar came to Bhagavan, he had been strongly influenced by the *Tirukkural*. Knowing this, Bhagavan incorporated a few references in his own contribution. The following lines contain a reference to verse 77: 'In the same way that the sun scorches boneless worms, *dharma* scorches those lacking in love.'

⁶Lines 233-54.

Sun of *dharma* who scorches those ghost-like ones
who show no loving conduct
so that they suffer unbearable misery!
It is not the fault of *dharma*
that those in whom there is no love
perish, quaking with agony
like boneless worms
exposed to the mid-day sun.
The ripe crop of destiny,
like a shadow, never goes away,
but follows and clings to those
who commit sinful deeds,
as if unable to control themselves.⁷

The original *Siva Puranam*, which was the model for this work, is an ecstatic outpouring of praise towards the divine. Bhagavan followed this formula for much of his own contribution, but he deviated from it in some places when he wrote down key aspects of his own teachings. Some of these topics can be found in earlier written works, such as *Ulladu Narpadu*, but others introduce subjects that are not found elsewhere in his writings.

Where the spurious, limited, and profitless ego,
which declares that the fleshy body is 'I',
bows its head in shame and falls away,

through the knowledge gained by sinking within
by means of the enquiry 'Who am I?',
conducted with extreme tenacity,

there do you shine, as the source of all things,
the luminous sky of pure consciousness,
which is not an empty void,

⁷Lines 487-92.

but in which the deluded perception
of the *triputis* has subsided;
[there] a deep rapture wells up,
wherein bliss abounds!⁸

This world is a moving picture show
of [sights and] sounds,
driven along with a great hubbub
by a whirlwind fuelled
by the unreal effects of former deeds,
which have no reality other than
in the imagination of the mind.
It is like an insubstantial mirage
that appears as a pool of water
to those who suffer,
tormented by their desire for water.⁹

No trace of doubt or contradiction
can arise within one's own nature, existence,
as it does in [the world of] the illusory objects of sense
which appear to be 'other'.

By virtue of this nature you are the Supreme Being,
the perpetually radiating sun of the Self,
which is the true reality,
impossible to reject or deny,
shining out in the darkness [of ignorance]
as the light [of *jnana*],
the 'I am' of even he
who denies your existence.¹⁰ ▲

⁸ Lines 375-80. The *triputis* are seeing, seer and seen, or knowing, knower and known.
This particular sequence of lines is an expanded version of *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse thirty.

⁹ Lines 451-55.

¹⁰ Lines 459-62.

Internet Resources

Part Three

DENNIS WAITE

E-Groups

These are discussion groups in which the participants communicate via email. Someone will write on a specific topic or question in which they are interested and this message will be sent to all members. Anyone may then respond and these responses are similarly copied to everyone. E-Groups (E for 'Electronic' presumably) have evolved from the original 'Listserves', 'Newsgroups' and 'Bulletin Boards' that provided a similar function in the early days of the Internet (and which still exist in some cases).

A group may be organised by an individual through his or her own website but, more usually, a central facility makes many different groups available. The biggest of these is Yahoo at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>. There are thousands of such groups, including 73 related to Advaita (as at 24th Aug 2005). Usually anyone may join but the owner of a

This article is from an appendix to the book *Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita* by Dennis Waite, scheduled for publication by O Books in 2007.

group is always able to exclude or ban members. Sometimes the posted messages are 'moderated', which means that the owner of the group will read messages before allowing them to be posted to everyone else. This enables the filtering out of abusive or off-topic messages. Many groups, however, are un-moderated and this can often result in a majority of messages consisting of irrelevant chat or so-called 'flame' mail, in which two or more members are simply very rude to each other!

Unfortunately, this has happened on otherwise very good, supposedly non-dual discussion groups. Because there are so many, I have personally only sampled a few and currently belong to only four. Accordingly, my recommendations here are not based upon extensive familiarity at all.

Advaita-L is probably the most authoritative group available for Advaita philosophy in the tradition of Sankara. Much of the material posted can be very academically biased however and is often related to Hindu ritualistic aspects. Naïve posts or observations not strictly within the guidelines for the list are not well tolerated. <http://lists.advaita-vedanta.org/cgi-bin/listinfo/advaita-l>

Advaitin is the group that I would most recommend. It exists to discuss any Advaita related topic, on any level. Though it takes the teachings of Sankara as its baseline, followers of Direct Path methods are not at all frowned upon! There are 1250 members as of August 2005. Many of its senior members are very knowledgeable and able to comment learnedly on all topics. There are also numbers of relative newcomers, both from traditional Indian backgrounds and from other Western traditions. Questions from newcomers to the philosophy are always treated with respect and never answered patronizingly. There are clear guidelines for behavior in the group and intervention by the moderators is very rare. Disrespect or posts that are outside of the subject matter are not tolerated, however. In the 5 1/2 years of my membership there have been many excellent discussions. There are also ongoing expositions, with discussion from time to time, on topics such as the Bhagavad Gita and on Sankara's bhAShya on the brahmasUtra.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/advaitin>

NonDualitySalon is a long-established group (the first of its kind) which, after a period of rest has now re-opened and has 859 members at Aug. 2005. It is run by Jerry Katz, who also has one of the largest web sites on Non-duality, listed above under 'General Information on Advaita'. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NonDualitySalon/>

NonDualPhil – I left this group in October 2004 after a prolonged period of heated exchanges between several members. Accordingly I do not know how it is going at present. With 142 members in August 2005, this could certainly be worth trying again. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nondualphil>

SatsangDiary was set up in April 2004 primarily for those who attend satsangs of Advaita teachers living in or visiting the UK. There have been good discussions on aspects relating to the nature of enlightenment and, in particular, the different approaches of traditional and neo-advaita. As at August 2005, there has been very little activity for the past few months, though there are still around 100 members.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/satsangdiary>

Million Paths – There is intentionally not a lot of discussion on this list, which exists primarily for members to post extracts and quotations from the Sages. Principal amongst the sources are Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj, though any Advaita material (actual or effective) is acceptable. This list provides an excellent opportunity to discover ideas, and ways of expression, that strike a chord. 348 members at August 2005. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/millionpaths>

Harsha Satsangh discusses the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and others. It is a busy group with about 925 members as at August 2005.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HarshaSatsangh>

NDhighlights provides daily posts from 1 or 2 of the 4-5 members who run this group; there are no discussions on the material. The extracts that are posted draw on other sources on the Internet, including many non-dual E-Groups and websites. News articles, discourses, poetry and random information that has caught the interest of the posters — anything may appear. If you do not know where to look for inspiration, something here is likely to appeal eventually. 802 members at August 2005. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NDhighlights>

There are several E-groups specifically devoted to Ramana Maharshi. The two largest are **Ramana Maharshi** (788 members Aug. 2005 – <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RamanaMaharshi>) and **Ramana_Maharshi** (196 members - http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ramana_Maharshi/). And there is a 'silent group' (107 members - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SriRamana>), which simply emails members with a short quotation from Ramana each day.

For those who are interested they may read excerpts of recent editions of the *Mountain Path* at http://www.avaita.org.uk/reading/read_sages.htm#mountain_path

Others —Note that there are many other E-Groups that I have not investigated, including ones that are concerned with only a single teacher, e.g. Nisargadatta, Vivekananda. Many now operate through yahoo and the complete list of those may be searched at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>. Many of them are also described at <http://www.nonduality.com/list.htm>

Web Logs

Web logs, now better known as 'Blog Spots' or simply 'Blogs', began as transient web sites on which the owner was able to change information very quickly, often on a daily basis. Typically, these allowed people with lots of opinions on current affairs and the ability to express these in amusing ways to run what amounted to their own electronic newspaper or diary. There are now sites that provide the software to allow anyone to set up such a facility very easily. Of course, only those sites belonging to people who genuinely have something interesting to say survive, since the others never accumulate frequent visitors.

There are now a number of such Blogs devoted to Advaita-related topics and several of these may have 'staying power'. The ones that have come to my attention are as follows:

<http://advaitavedantameditations.blogspot.com/> from Floyd Henderson.

<http://www.atmainstitute.org/ajablog.htm> from Aja Thomas.

<http://nondualitynotes.blogspot.com/> from Gilbert Schultz.

<http://acalayoga.blogspot.com/> - Acalayoga and

<http://talksandconversations.blogspot.com/-Talks> and [Conversations](http://talksandconversations.blogspot.com/-Conversations). These last two are devoted to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi with links to downloads and extracts, upto date information on events and other relevant thoughts.

The Eternal Stateless State is the blog of Charlie Hayes, former professional racing driver, who is influenced by the Navnath sampradaya and the Neo-Advaitins. Contains links, book reviews, writings, photos, audio etc. i.e. more like a traditional website. <http://www.theeternalstate.org/>

KrishnaViswaroopam is apparently a more traditionally based blog, drawing on the teachings of the Upanishads and Swami Vivekananda. <http://krishnaviswaroopam.blogspot.com/>

Non-duality Cartoons has a number of... well, cartoons depicting various aspects of non-duality from illustrator Bob Seal. <http://advaitoons.blogspot.com/> ▲

WHO'S WHO?

VIBHAV TEWARI

I am dead, but always alive
 I am crying, but always calm
 I am shouting, but always silent
 I am abused, but always fulfilled
 I am depressed, but always happy
 I am sick, but always pain-free
 I am old, but always glowing
 I am exploited, but always esteemed
 I am lost, but always here
 I am separated, but always one

So,
 Who Am I ?

Dhyana Song

SWAMI RAMANANANDA SARASWATHI

*The Dhyana Song is a free adaption for children to sing in eka tala.
The original song is Sri Sadhu Om's Dhyanaappattu which can be
found in prose form in his Sadhanai Saram, Verse No 511 - 523.*

Be seated without closed eyes and think,
of God alone without your thoughts,
on anything except on God,
let the mind dwell on God alone.

Due to thinking of the seen world,
the thoughts of God will disappear,
with initial firm resolve,
meditate on Him alone.

By nature having no form nor name
He is pure Bliss Consciousness;
However He reveals Himself,
in any name you contemplate.

Within your Heart, deep within,
there exists a joyful thing,
when sought with love it is revealed
as limitless, joyful, purest Bliss.

God who is Omnipresent,
can be felt in the cave of the Heart;
sighting Him in the Heart alone,
all is seen as God Himself.

As knowing witness of the thoughts
God is present in one and all;
Where thoughts subside into the Heart,
there God rises and reveals Himself.

To seek the way to banish thoughts,
listen to Lord Ramana's words;
The moment a thought comes
see to whom thought arise.

As thoughts arise to you alone
see who this 'I' is.
As you see the thinking you,
the risen thought will subside.

Constantly as you look within
Knowledge Supreme will bloom in you;
Be victorious by looking ever (at you)
the very Transcendental Awareness.

Of all various learnings
education on Divine is supreme;
Of all great attainments deep
Self contemplation is supreme.

The prime motive of physical birth
is to experience ever true Bliss (within);
Having become God ever (established ever)
you may drop the body and be free.

Blessedness is God's nature,
darkness is the nature of world;
This fact will become revealed
when nature of Truth is probed.

May true guru Ramana live!
may the path of knowledge live!
Life lived by the devotees
in bliss of Self live, for ever.

Om santhi.



Bhagavan, Manikkavachakar and Tiruvachakam

Part Four

T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN
ROBERT BUTLER,
AND DAVID GODMAN

Tiruvachakam references in Bhagavan's replies to devotees

(6)

Meanwhile, a Tamil devotee opened the *Tiruvachakam* and began singing the 'Songs of Pursuit'. Towards the end comes the passage, 'O Iswara, You are trying to flee, but I am holding You fast. So where can You go and how can You escape from me?'

Bhagavan commented with a smile, 'So it seems that He is trying to flee and they are holding Him fast! Where could He flee to? Where is He not present? Who is He? All this is nothing but a pageant. There is another sequence of songs in the same book, one of which goes, "O my Lord, You have made my mind Your abode. You have given Yourself up to me and in return have taken me into You. Lord, which

of us is the cleverer? If You have given Yourself up to me, I enjoy endless bliss, but of what use am I to You, even though You have made of my body Your temple, out of Your boundless mercy to me? What is it I could do for You in return? I have nothing now that I could call my own.” This means that there is no such thing as “I”. See the beauty of it! Where there is no such thing as “I”, who is the doer and what is it that is done, whether it be devotion or self-enquiry or *samadhi*?¹

Mother! Father! Matchless jewel!
Rare nectar, the ripening of love!
To me in this worm-ridden fleshly form,
I who diminish my days by multiplying falsity,
You are the treasure that bestowed upon me
that state of Sivahood, perfect and true!
Sivan, our noble Lord!
In this very birth I’ve grasped You tight!
Henceforth, how can You leave and go,
elsewhere, in grace Your form to show?

Wicked as I was, the love You gave to me
was greater yet than a mother’s love,
who suckles her child, anticipating its needs!
Melting my flesh, flooding me with light within
infusing me with the nectar of undying bliss,
You are the treasure rich
that wandered with me wherever I went!
Sivan, our noble Lord!
Close following You, I’ve grasped You tight!
Henceforth how can You leave and go,
elsewhere, in grace Your form to show?²

¹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 8th September, 1947.

² ‘Piditta Pattu’, vv. 3 and 9.

What You have given is Yourself.
What You took in exchange, O Sankara, is me.
Who is the wiser of us two?
What I have gained is bliss that has no end.
What single thing have You obtained from me?
O Lord who made my mind His shrine!
Hail Siva, dwelling in Holy Perunturai!
For Your taking up residence in my body,
I cannot, my father, God,
offer you any fitting recompense.³

(7)

A question was asked about the Upanishadic passage, ‘The Supreme Spirit is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest’.

Bhagavan: Even the structure of the atom has been found by the mind. Therefore the mind is subtler than the atom. That which is behind the mind, namely the individual soul, is subtler than the mind. Furthermore, the Tamil saint Manikkavachakar has said of the specks dancing in a beam of sunlight, that if each represents a universe, the whole sunlight will represent the Supreme Being.⁴

The origin of the universal sphere,
composed of its [various] elements,
its immeasurable nature,
its vast and rich array of visible forms –
if one were to describe the beauty
of how these appear in manifestation,
each connected one to the other,
[one would find] that they expand
to a thousand million and more.

³ ‘Koyil Tirupatikam’, verse 10.

⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 15.

So great He is that all the worlds
appear like tiny specks, floating
in a sunbeam as it falls into a house.⁵

Manikkavachakar's passing away

Manikkavachakar eventually settled down in Chidambaram and spent his final years in that town. The Tiruvadavuradigal Puranam, chapter six, records a remarkable episode that took place there.

The story begins with a devotee of Siva going to Sri Lanka and singing the praises of Chidambaram and its Golden Hall where Siva resides. The king of Sri Lanka heard about him and summoned him to appear in his court. The sadhu went and gave a speech to the king in which he extolled the greatness of Chidambaram. A Buddhist scholar who was present became angry and said that he would travel to Chidambaram, convert all the Saivas there and install a statue of the Buddha in the temple. The king, who had a daughter who was dumb, decided to travel to Chidambaram as well in the hope that she might be cured there.

On their arrival, the Buddhist scholar challenged the devotees of Siva to a debate, saying that he would defeat them in argument and prove that their beliefs were wrong. His challenge was accepted and it was agreed that the debate would take place in the presence of the king of Sri Lanka and the king of the territory that contained Chidambaram.

On the night before the debate Siva appeared in the dreams of all the temple priests and told them that they should go to Manikkavachakar's hut and ask him to be their representative in the debate. Manikkavachakar agreed to come the next day and refute the Buddhist's arguments. When the debate got under way, both the Buddhist scholar and Manikkavachakar severely criticised and ridiculed the other's point of view.

⁵ 'Tiruvandappahudi', lines 1-6.

At one point Manikkavachakar grew angry with what he said were the lies coming out of the Buddhist's mouth. He called on Saraswati, the goddess of speech, to leave the Buddhist's tongue so that he could no longer utter any falsehoods. When Saraswati complied with this request, the scholar and his associates were all struck dumb. The Sri Lankan king, impressed by this performance, prostrated before Manikkavachakar and informed him that his own daughter was dumb. He added that if Manikkavachakar could cure her, he himself would convert and become a Saiva.

Manikkavachakar called the daughter and asked her to give a public refutation of all the arguments that the Buddhist scholar had propounded. The daughter obliged and, speaking for the first time in her life, gave an erudite lecture that refuted the Buddhist position. The king, overjoyed, became a Saiva and requested Manikkavachakar to cure the dumbness of the Buddhist scholars. Manikkavachakar obliged, and the Buddhists, after acknowledging their erroneous views, also converted to Saivism.

Though Manikkavachakar had composed the songs that comprise the Tiruvachakam and sung them all over Tamil Nadu, the poems themselves had never been written down. Suri Nagamma once asked Bhagavan about how the Tiruvachakam came to be written, and Bhagavan replied by recounting the final dramatic details of Manikkavachakar's life:

Nagamma: When was the *Tiruvachakam* written?

Bhagavan: No, [Manikkavachakar] he never wrote [it]. He merely went about singing his songs.

Nagamma: Then how did *Tiruvachakam* get to be written?

Bhagavan: Oh that! He was going from one place to another until he came to Chidambaram. While witnessing Nataraja's dance he started singing heartmelting songs and stayed in that place itself. Then one day [Siva] Nataraja, with a view to making people know the greatness of Manikkavachakar and to bless the people with such an excellent collection of hymns, went to the house of Manikkavachakar in the

night, in the guise of a brahmin. He was received cordially and when asked for the purpose of the visit, the Lord smilingly and with great familiarity asked, 'It seems you have been singing hymns during your visit to the sacred places of pilgrimage and that you are doing it here also. May I hear them? I have been thinking of coming and listening to you for a long time but could not find the required leisure. That is why I have come here at night. I suppose you don't mind. Can you sing? Do you remember them all?'

'There is no need to worry about sleep,' [replied Manikkavachakar] 'I shall sing all the songs I remember. Please listen.'

So saying Manikkavachakar began singing in ecstasy. The Lord in the guise of a brahmin sat down there writing the songs on palm leaves. As Manikkavachakar was in ecstasy he hardly noticed the brahmin who was taking down the songs. Singing on and on, he completely forgot himself in the thought of God and ultimately became silent. The old brahmin quietly disappeared.

At daybreak the *dikshitar* [priest] came to the Nataraja temple as usual to perform the morning *puja* and as he opened the doors he found in front of the Nataraja image on the doorstep a palm-leaf book. When the book was opened and scrutinised there were in it not only the words '*Tiruvachakam*', it was also written that the book was written as it was dictated by Manikkavachakar. It was signed below '*Tiruchitrambalam* [*Udaiyan*]', meaning 'the Owner of] Chidambaram'. The stamp of Sri Nataraja also was there below the signature. Thereupon all the temple priests gathered in great surprise and sent word to Manikkavachakar, showed him the *Tiruvachakam*, and the signature of Nataraja, and asked him to tell them about the genesis of the hymns.

Manikkavachakar did not say anything but asked them to accompany him, went to the temple of Nataraja and standing opposite the Lord said, 'Sirs, the Lord in front of us is the only answer to your question. He is the answer.' After having said that, he merged into the Lord.

[Suri Nagamma comments:] As he narrated the story, Bhagavan's voice got choked. Unable to speak any more he remained in ecstatic silence.⁶

This version does not make it completely clear that Manikkavachakar vanished from sight at this moment by merging into the formless space of consciousness. In verse 1,324 of Padamalai Bhagavan emphasised this dramatic ending in the following words:

When asked by others about the meaning of the *Tiruvachakam*, the great and saintly Manikkavachakar pointed at the subtle *chidakasa* [space of consciousness] and merged in it.⁷

Bhagavan was once asked how this was possible:

He [Bhagavan] remarked, 'Manikkavachakar is one of those whose body finally resolved itself in a blazing light, without leaving a corpse behind.'

Another devotee asked how this could be.

Maharshi said that the gross body is only the concrete form of the subtle stuff – the mind. When the mind melts away and blazes forth as light, the body is consumed in that process. Nandanar [an outcaste saint] is another whose body disappeared in blazing light.⁸ ▲

⁶ *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, pp. 10-12.

⁷ *Padamalai*, page 355.

⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 215.



Tiru Em Paavai

ROBERT BUTLER

The *Tiruvempaavai*, named from its recurring refrain *El Or Empaavai*, was written by the Tamil poet-sage Manikkavachakar during his visit to Tiruvannamalai on his way to Chidambaram, where, according to tradition, he was to merge with the ultimate reality, Lord Siva, in a blaze of light, leaving no physical trace behind. The purely ecstatic mood of the poem seems to prefigure that final apotheosis. The genesis of the poem is described as follows in an early biography of the saint, the *Tiruvadavur Adigal Puranam*:

It was in the month of Margazhi, when, in the ten days before the ardhra asterism, beautiful maidens go from house to noble house calling each other forth in the early dawn, just as the darkness is dispersing, and, banding together, go to bathe in the holy tank. On observing their noble qualities, he sang the immortal hymn *Tiruvempaavai*.

There have been many more or less esoteric interpretations of this work, but the simplest, and least controversial, if indeed any interpretation be required at all, is to regard it as a divine allegory in

which the individual soul or *jiva* calls upon its fellows to awake from the darkness of delusion, and gain salvation by coming to bathe in the blissful waters at the dawn of the Lord's grace, personified in the form of his Consort, Uma-Parvati.

The refrain has not been translated and it is not usual to do so. If translated it might mean something like: *Fair Maid of ours, embrace and know (the Lord)*. One may assume that it was already *fossilized* as a ritual refrain at the time of the composition, expressing in a multi-faceted way the exhilaration and heightened spiritual awareness of the participants in the bathing ritual.

1.

Though you hear us sing of that rare Light
whose greatness knows neither source nor end,
O Maid, whose eyes are wide and bright,
as we wend through the street
do you still sleep? Do your ears not hear
the prayers that we pray to the Lord's cinctured feet?
As you, sobbing, roll from your flower-strewn couch,
to lie lost in swoon, of nought aware,
what then, what then?
Is this the nature of our companion fair?
El Or Empaavai!

2.

It is ever your wont, both day and night,
when ere we speak,
O Maid with flawless jewels adorned,
to offer your love to that Supernal Light.
Whence now your desire for this flowery couch?
*For shame, jewelled Maidens, is it then meet
to play and jest in this holy place
where he comes in grace the grace to grant
of His flowery feet, that, all abashed,*

*the Hosts of Heaven fear to adore?
Dancer in Tillai's sacred Hall!
God! Teacher! Sivaloka's Lord!
Are we not His lovers, all?
El Or Empaavai!*

Note: Verses 2-4 take the form of a series of verbal exchanges between the group of girls in the street, and another of their number who is proving a little tardy in coming out to join the group in their procession to the tank. The words of the girl inside the house are given in italics. The tone appears to be one of playful *badinage*. Is the girl merely half-asleep, or lost in contemplation of the Lord? They carry on speaking to her for a number of verses subsequently, until, as we may assume, she comes out and joins them and they make their way together to the tank.

3.

With pearly smile, arise, come forth, open your door,
speak words with sweetness overflowing
of the Ambrosial One, the Lord, our Blissful Paramour.
*Decorous maids, devoted Ones, God's ancient faithful!
what sin is it if we His fledgling devotees, our frailty to dispel,
fall subject to His gracious rule?*
Is this deceit? Your love for Him know we not full well?
Should not they, whose minds are pure
our own Lord Siva praise and adore?
Thus much we ask of you, no more!
El Or Empaavai!

4.

*You whose smiles are radiant pearls,
is this not dawn's light?
With voices sweet, have you all come
like parrots, all in plumage bright?
We'll count and tell, but you at least*

forbear to vainly pass your hours in sleep!
 Of Him who's Heaven's balm, the Vedas' hidden law,
 of Him who to our eyes is bliss, we sing,
 as hearts soften, melt and flow in rapture deep —
 we can no more — come yourself and count
 and if there's any lack, go back to sleep.
El Or Empaavai!

5.
 Deceitful maid upon whose lips
 milk mixed with honey flows,
 the Mount that Ayan could not see, nor Visnu know,
 we'll know, you said, but surely lied —
 else let your door be opened wide!
 Of how He came in majesty, we sing,
 unseen by heaven, earth, and all the rest,
 cleansed our souls, became our King.
 'Sivan, Sivan', goes up our heartfelt plea,
 But you, fair Dame, with perfumed braids,
 Do you not know? Can you not, see?
El Or Empaavai!

6.
 But yesterday 'To rouse you up,
 tomorrow I shall come', you said,
 so tell now, shameless, doe-eyed One,
 as dawn's light breaks,
 whither have you wandering gone?
 He's Sky, He's Earth, He's all that is,
 but Him we cannot know.
 Yet to those who praise
 those cinctured feet, from heaven come,
 His own protecting grace to show,
 you speak no word,
 your body does not melt and flow.

Your nature may be so —
 but for our sake and all others too, sing
 and praise our heavenly King!
El Or Empaavai!

7.
 Sister, some traits we know of you:
 when clarion calls proclaim
 Him whom Gods in heaven all know not,
 The One, the glorious Lord on High,
 your wont it is
 to open wide your mouth and *Sivan* cry,
 and e'en before the shout
 of *Southern One!* is raised,
 you melt like wax before a flame.
 'My own Lord! King! Ambrosia sweet!'
 you've heard our several voices say,
 and yet, alone, you slumbering stay!
 In silence like those foolish ones
 whose hearts are stone, you lie.
 To such a sleep,
 what worth can we ascribe?
El Or Empaavai!

8.
 Song of bird and cockerel cry are everywhere;
 everywhere the white conch calls,
 and music of the seven-toned scale resounds.
 Grace unequalled, Light Supreme, beyond compare,
 exalted peerless Essence, we sing, do you not hear?
 What sleep, bless you, is this? Will you not speak!
 Is it thus, like ocean-dwelling Visnu, all asleep,
 that the love we bear our King shall be repaid?
 So sing the First One at the end of time,
 the only One, the Partner of the artless Maid!
El Or Empaavai!

Note: The 'sleeping' girl is jokingly compared to Lord Visnu, who performs his allotted function of preserving the cosmic sphere as he lies asleep upon the Ocean of Milk. The exact point of the joke is unclear. Possibly it is saying: 'Do you think that you are equal to Lord Visnu, in thinking that you can show the required love to Lord Siva merely by remaining asleep?'

9.

Timeless essence of this ancient world,
yet ever born anew in each created form!
We fair devotees have won You for our Lord,
and now to those who serve Your holy feet
we'll bow down low as worshippers devout.
To these alone shall we belong.
They shall be our husbands, whom we
shall humbly serve as they in joy decree.
Our King, if You to us this boon do grant,
no lack for us can ever be!
El Or Empaavai!

10.

Beneath the seven realms of Hell His lotus feet
reach down, transcending speech, and on His head
His crown, with flowers intertwined, of all reality
is the crown! His lady is the half of Him, He is not One.
He is our sole Companion, whose glory
the Vedas first, then Gods and earth itself,
try as the may, are powerless to sing.
Within His devotees He dwells,
the peerless Leader of our clan!
O temple maids,
where is His home and what His name?
Who is His foe and who His kin,
and how may we His praises sing?
El Or Empaavai!

11.

Into the broad and buzzing tank we splashing wade
scoop water in our hands and scoop again,
and sing Your holy feet. Oh Master, see how we
Your faithful devotees are blest!
Rich, red as burning fire, with ash besmeared
You are the Bridegroom of the Maid whose
eyes are dark and wide, whose waist is slim!
O Lord, in this Your play of grace we've fully done
all that whereby a soul's salvation may be won.
Guard us, lest we weary in our task.
El Or Empaavai!

12.

Lord of the holy spring
where we rejoicing bathe,
that pressing woes of birth may die!
Dancer midst the dancing flames
in noble Tillai's Court!
To guard, create and then conceal this heaven,
earth, and all that is, is but Your sport!
No sooner do we speak, than in the tank
with flowers bright, we plunge and splash.
Bees hum about our jewelled braids
as bangles tinkle, girdles clash.
Our Master's golden Foot we praise
as in the waters wide we bathe.
El Or Empaavai!

13.

With lotus blossoms red and fresh
and water lilies' purple hue,
with snakes and choirs of tiny birds,
and those who've come to cleanse their sins
assembled here, this surging tank

recalls to us our Queen and King,
as in we plunge and plunge again.
Bangles jingle, anklets ring,
and swelling waters swell our breasts
as in the lotus pool we spring.

El Or Empaavai!

14.

As jewels of gold and ear-rings sway,
as braids entwined with flowers swing,
and swarms of insects, flitting, play,
of Tillai's sacred Hall we sing
as in the cooling flood we bathe.
We sing the Vedas' inner sense
and how He that sense withholds.
The First One's glory sing we now,
the glory of the Last,
we sing the beauty of that Light,
the kondrai wreath upon His brow
we sing, and of the holy Feet
of that fair Maid who makes us grow
and bear us up at every stage,
we sing and bathe.

El Or Empaavai!

15.

Upon one time, there lived
a dame who ever cried 'Our Lord. Our Lord'.
His glorious name ne'er left her lips,
and in her heart was melting bliss,
whilst tears in endless streams coursed down,
as, prostrating once, she rose not from the ground.
To other Gods she gave no praise,
but only to our mighty King, like one possessed,
she homage paid. Where is her like?

To her wise Feet, O Maids with jewels
upon your full and shapely breasts,
we sing full-voiced and plunging bathe
within this fair and flowering flood.

El Or Empaavai!

Note: In verse 15 Manikkavachakar sings of Karaikal Ammaiyar who is one of the 63 Saiva Saints, the Nayanmar whose stories are told in the Periya Puranam (*Tiru Ninra Sarukkam* v. 1722 – 1787). Her name was Punithavathiyar, and she was the beautiful young wife of a merchant of the town of Karaikaal. Her devotion to Lord Siva knew no bounds. Rejected by her husband as a wife, on account of her divine attributes, she prayed to Lord Siva to become one of his celestial hosts, a demoness with dried and shrivelled flesh, whose only desire was to worship the Lord, and witness his divine dance. When she finally approached Mount Kailash, walking on her head out of respect for the Lord, Lord Siva did not hesitate to hold her up, even before his own consort Uma, as a model of divine love: *Varum ival nammai peenum ammai kaan, ummaiye!* "See, Uma, she who comes is the Mother who loves us well!" Henceforth her name became Karaikal Ammaiyar. A number of poems of hers are contained in the 11th *Tirumurai* (Tamil Holy Scripture), which is an anthology composed of the writings of a number of different saints.

16.

O Cloud, you drank the sea,
then like our Queen arose,
and, glorious, shone with lightning bolts
fine as the slender waist
of Her who rules our souls.
The golden anklets at her feet
sound in your thunder's roar,
and in your rainbow bright

her holy arching brow we see.
 And like the ample grace
 which she, our Queen, affords
 to us who stand before,
 as servants of our royal Lord
 whose side she quits no more, O Cloud,
 let your torrents pour!

El Or Empaavai!

17.

You whose dusky locks in perfumed coils flow!
 Of Him who brings delight which red-eyed Mal
 and Brahma too with all the Gods could never know,
 who purifies our souls, and then in every home arises
 His compassion to bestow;
 the Warrior, who grants to us His lotus feet
 of ruddy gold, the fair-eyed King,
 our Lord as rare ambrosia sweet unto His devotees,
 we'll sing, His glory to extol,
 as in the flowery lotus flood we plunging go.

El Or Empaavai!

18.

Even as the gems that thickly cluster
 upon the crowns of Gods on high,
 when they bow down, will lose their lustre
 before the lotus feet of Lord Annamalai,
 likewise the sun, with bright-eyed gaze
 dispels the darkness with his rays,
 so that stars flee as their cool light fades.
 Thus does He stand before us
 as woman, man, and androgyne,
 as luminous space, as earth itself,
 and yet from all these separate,
 ambrosia to the eye made manifest.

So sing you then His holy feet, O Maid,
 and in the flowery flood, plunging, bathe!
El Or empaavai!

19.

In awe do we that time-worn phrase renew:
 'The refuge for the child
 entrusted to your hand is you!'
 So hear us Lord, as now these vows we take,
 that none but Your true devotees
 shall press our bosoms to their chest,
 our hands to none but You shall holy service make,
 our eyes no other sight shall see by night or day.
 If, then, our King, You thus to us do grant,
 then what's it to us? Let the sun rise where it may!

El Or Empaavai!

20.

Praise to Your lotus feet, the First! Grant us Your grace!
 Praise to Your ruddy feet, the Last! Grant us Your grace!
 Praise be, the feet of gold, the source of all that lives !
 Praise be, the flowery feet, the bliss of all that lives !
 Praise be to Your twin feet, of all that lives the final goal!
 Praise be, the lotus flower, to Mal and Brahma both unknown!
 Praise to the golden feet that us in grace enslaved, and saved!
 Praise be, we say, and bathing go in this the month of Margazhi!

El Or Empaavai! ▲



BOOK EXCERPT

Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamin

A.R. NATARAJAN

His Holiness Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamin was the pontiff of the venerable Sringeri Mutt from 1912 to 1954. Even in the revered lineage of Sankaracharyas he was exceptional. His wisdom, scholarship, firm adherence to tradition, kindness and integrity were widely recognised and respected. He wrote a commentary of Sankara's Vivekachudmani which has become a classic of Hindu spirituality. The text has been translated into English and is published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

A.R. Natarajan has written a brief but comprehensive biography that is profusely illustrated with many photos of the Sankaracharya, many of which are rare and possibly have not been published before. The later half of the book contains a series of talks H.H. gave on various topics of spirituality. The book is a quality production and is published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore. The hardbound costs Rs400/- ; the paperback Rs325/-.

The Mahaswami had become the head of the Sharada Peetha in 1912. His Digvijaya, Vijaya Yatra,¹ and his spiritual guidance while at Sringeri resulted in the spreading of his reputation as a 'Jivanmukta' among the devotees all over India. They were keen on demonstrating their love and reverence for him and were waiting for the proper time.

The devotees found an excellent opportunity for pouring out their feelings in 1952 on the occasion of Mahaswami's sixtieth birth year. Without his knowledge and assuming his consent they proceeded to make elaborate arrangements for celebrating this event. To mark this occasion, they organized an 'Atirudhra Swahakara Maha Yagna' and a 'Sahasra Chandi Homa',² which had not been performed for over one hundred and fifty years in Sringeri.

The Mahaswami refused to participate directly in these celebrations because he felt strongly that such celebrations were not in order for those who had taken to sannyasa. However, he allowed the organisers to proceed with their plans since it was for Lokahita, the good of the world, and was present at the time of Poornahuti.³ All the arrangements were supervised by Abhinava Vidya Tirtha Mahaswami.

The Mahaswami had indicated that if the Vedic Gods to whom these sacraments were offered were pleased, there would be a visible demonstration of it by way of a downpour of rain at the end. On the last day, there was suspense in the minds of the devotees because there were no clouds or any other indication that it would rain. However, at the conclusion of these sacraments, there was a heavy downpour of rain. All were happy and feel that it was a sure sign of the Mahaswami's grace and his having blessed their efforts.

Early in 1954, Dr. Radhakrishnan, the Vice President of India paid his respects to the Mahaswami and discussed various matters connected with the scriptures. On the 14th of July Mahaswami performed customary 'Vyasa-pooja' and observed Chaturmasya.⁴

¹ Religious tour. Literally, 'Conqueror of space' and 'Victory tour'.

² Vedic fire-rituals in honour of Rudra and the Goddess respectively.

³ Final or complete offering.

⁴ Four months of the rainy season which starts on Vsyapooja or Guru Poornima, the full moon generally in July. A sanyasin stays in one place for that period.



On 24th August 1954, the first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad visited Sringeri to pay his homage to the Jagadguru. He had heard that the Mahaswami fully fitted the description of a 'Sthitapragna', a person of steady wisdom, described in the 'Bhagavad Gita'. The meeting took place in the courtyard of the Sharada temple.

The subject matter of their conversation was dharma and allied subjects. The Mahaswami spoke in Sanskrit and His Holiness Abhinava Vidya Tirtha Mahaswami translated the same into chaste Hindi. They met again in the afternoon to discuss some other points which had not been covered in the earlier meeting. The President's happiness knew no bounds because he had been in the company of a Mahapurusha.

A few weeks later the annual festival in honour of Ganesa was celebrated, which is a special event in Sringeri. It is marked by a full week of discussions and speeches under the auspices of the Peetha. The Mahaswami was present during the sessions on all the seven days listening attentively to the speakers, and uplifting the whole atmosphere. On the last day when the idol of Ganesa was immersed in the river he was present for more than half an hour witnessing the proceedings and graciously blessing the devotees.

Amidst all these activities the complete detachment of the Mahaswami went unnoticed. He seemed to be convinced that the divine purpose for which he had taken the human birth had been fulfilled. He had trained his disciple in whom he could see a spiritual aura and dynamic presence which lead to an unparalleled growth of the Sharada Peetha. His pilgrimage to the places closely associated with his guru was over. He felt like a bird ready to fly.

The world was taken in by the fact that he had participated in various activities in 1954. They failed to attach importance to his aloofness during his Shastiabdhapoorti celebrations⁵ and to his non-participation directly in the discussions during the Ganesa festival. Little could they realize that his Mahasamadhi was round the corner when he had granted two interviews in the evening of the twenty fifth of September. These appearances were deceptive. After the interviews he

⁵ Sixtieth Birthday.

did not return to his apartment but stood in front of his guru's Samadhi for nearly two hours. Even when he returned to his apartment he did not take the fruits and milk offered by the attendant.

During the night he did the Pradakshina of his guru's Samadhi several times and perhaps visited Kala Bhairava temple also. He had been initiated into Sanyasa there by guru Narasimha Bharati Mahaswami before being sent by him to Bangalore for his further studies. He was also chanting loudly verses from 'Atma Vidya Vilasam'.

The following day was Sunday, 26th September, Mahalaya Amavasya, the day chosen by the Mahaswami to cast off his body in the Tunga river. For him the body had served its purpose. Early in the morning at 4:00 a.m. he got ready to go to the river for a bath, overruling the objections of his attendant that it was chill and that hot water was ready for his bath. The Mahaswami started towards the river inspite of the slight drizzle. Walking at a fast pace, he quickly reached the riverbank even before his attendant could reach it. His attendant cautioned him not to go far and was given the assurance that he would not do so.

The Mahaswami had actually gone further. Another attendant noticed the Mahaswami turning back a few steps and assuming a Padmasana posture. In a couple of minutes they were shocked to see the Mahaswami's body floating in the Padmasana posture in the Tunga river.

Immediately one of the attendants jumped into the river and with the help of another person, who was providentially bathing at that time, brought his holy body back to the shore. Only twenty minutes had lapsed since the first dip. Abhinava Vidya Tirtha Mahaswami maintaining his calm inspite of his deep sorrow tried all possible means to ensure his recovery but it was of no avail. The fingers of the Mahaswami's hand had assumed the 'Chinmudra', the famous insignia of the Adiguru Dakshinamurti. The Jagadguru's face was shining with dazzling brilliance. ▲



Abhinava Vidyatirtha Bharati, the Junior Sankaracharya, paying obeisance to his guru.

BOOK EXCERPT

Fulfilment of Life's Purpose

CHANDRASEKHARA BHARATI MAHASWAMI

Effort is needed now

It has already been explained that Self-knowledge alone enables one to abide in a state of inherent natural happiness. It has also been mentioned that Self-knowledge is not possible so long as one erroneously foists the notion of the Self on the body. One should prepare oneself by purifying one's mind by offering the results of one's actions to God.

Many other religions believe that this is the only life. Hence whatever effort one has to make to move Godward has to be made in this life itself. Hinduism postulates that we have already taken innumerable births. Logically this could well mean that further lives would also be there. One may therefore take the lazy attitude of a futuristic outlook in respect of spiritual efforts. However, one must not squander the great human birth by lack of earnestness. If we ourselves underrate the worth of human birth what guarantee is there that the birth would

MOUNTAIN PATH

also be as a human being? How can we misuse the present opportunity given by God and at the same time expect a repetition of the good fortune in the next birth as well?

It is not enough if one is born as a human being. One must regard it as a means for attaining true knowledge, a means for becoming Self-realised. If one were to attain Self-knowledge merely by being born, all of us should be jnanis by now because we have had many earlier births. Mere number of births is not the criterion. The only yardstick is how far life has been used for mental purification and for seeking the truth. Had we observed the scriptural injunctions, our birth cycle would have ended long ago. In fact one wonders sometimes whether we are doing our best to avoid Self-knowledge. It is said that God, in His incarnations as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna had blessed many and liberated them by His look and touch. It is quite possible that we were also living in those times. We must have carefully avoided any contact with His grace. Even if we had been a creeper or a grass in the Dandakaranya forest, the dust of Sri Rama's feet would have liberated us. We must have gone out of the way to avoid the touch of those sacred feet! One must not lose sight of the fact that it is only in the human birth that one can practise the spiritual path and evolve.

This alone is the land for action

Life on this earth alone is conducive to the search for truth. People living in the heavens are pre-occupied with enjoyment and are given to sensate lives only. Therefore they will not have any desire to seek the truth. They have to be born on this earth after the exhaustion of their good karma and work again towards Self-knowledge.

This is the land for attaining jnana

The Upanishads assert that the earth and Brahmaloaka alone are the place where one can diligently pursue the search for truth. Brahmaloaka is accessible only to those whose punya is overflowing. Logically for most of us Brahmaloaka is out of bounds. Sorrow and failure are needed to turn the mind towards enquiry of truth. Further, it is only in the human birth that one is able experience the happiness arising from



body identification and so experience a state in which there is no body idea. This can be seen from the fact that we are daily experiencing three mental states. In the waking and dream states we have body identification, whereas in deep sleep there is no awareness of the body.

Again because one undergoes suffering one can easily perceive that the body and mind decay and begin to enquire about the truth.

Life should not be wasted

One must make earnest and sustained effort for Self- knowledge by making proper enquiry and practising what has been learnt. Some fundamental questions like 'Who am I?', 'Why this birth?', 'Is there any way out of it?' have to be asked. Unfortunately for most people their pre-occupations are so much that they do not examine these vital questions. Schooling and play take care of first sixteen years of one's life. In youth one is lost in enjoying sensate pleasures. Then the decay of body and mind starts. When death's call comes they would have wasted their lives having lost sight of the very purpose of life which is to attain true knowledge. Is this invaluable human birth needed for just enjoying sensate pleasures? Animal life would have been sufficient.

Bhartrahari asks, "For baking cattle fodder is a vessel made of diamond necessary? To till the land do we need a golden plough? To provide manure for the fence do we need to sprinkle loads of camphor?" Similarly, where is the need for being born in this sacred earth as a human being if one were to waste it by giving in only to sensate attractions? Even if one loses a couple of rupees one is downcast for three days. Having attained this rarest treasure, human birth, if we do not attain Self-knowledge and just drift along it would be a tragedy of the highest order. Understandably the Kathopanishad asserts that one who does not attain Self-knowledge inspite of human birth has truly lost everything that is worthwhile.

Means for Knowledge

All people do not show interest in finding out the truth. Four types of spiritual practices are needed to develop interest in and to be sustained in the pursuit of truth. The first is the discrimination between the



Real and the Unreal. This means that one becomes aware that the Self alone is real and all the rest is transient. The next aspect is to lose interest in all transient things by not desiring the fruits of action in earth or heaven. Another aspect is 'sama', which is to control thoughts about the past, future and the present, 'dama' is losing interest in what is seen and heard. Then there is 'titiksha' which means capacity to bear heat and cold alike. Detachment is called 'uparadhi'. Having faith in the guru's words and scriptural regulations is called 'shraddha'. Tranquility of mind is called 'samadhana'. All these virtues are together named as 'samadhishatsampatti'. The desire to be liberated from the allurements of worldly life and to be single minded about the search for truth is called 'mumukshutva'. People who have faith in these virtues and are diligent in their practice are likely to attain Self-knowledge.

Our Duty

Some are greedy to attain the state of steady wisdom without putting in the necessary effort. When they lack the basic interest in finding out the truth and do not perform actions in the manner which will liberate, it would be idle to expect any results. Even though two students may be studying in the same class under the same teacher, one may fail because he neglects the studies and another pass out brilliantly due to the effort put in. Similarly if some are shining examples of jnana and others are steeped in ignorance it is due to indifference and lack of interest.

Some argue that they would rather do social service. To seek to do social service without any knowledge about one's own life is like a man who does not know swimming offering to take another person across the river on his back. What kind of contribution can such persons make to the society? They are only cheating themselves.

A person who wastes his life without effort to become Self-aware is not only a fool but also one who has committed suicide. An intelligent person must make every effort to be free from worldly entanglements and seek Self-knowledge. Wisdom demands that one should surrender to a Self-realised jnani, live according to his guidance and become liberated. ▲

RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



Dear Children of Bhagavan,
We have a very special treat for you this time. Thanks to our friends at the Archives at Sri Ramanasramam, we have in Bhagavan's very own handwriting the most powerful words, "Who Am I?" written in Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu and Hindi. Enjoy it!

நான் யார் ?

“मैं कौन हूँ?”

कीहं ?

నాను యారు?

We all know how much Bhagavan emphasized the practice of the 'Who Am I' technique. He did not recommend this only to adults. Here is a story illustrating how He endorsed it 100% to the littlest of children. One day five-year old Indira, daughter of a staunch devotee G.V.Subbaramayya, turning over the pages of the Telugu *Upadesa Saram*, a new edition that had just come out, picked up the first letters of bold type in the four lines of a Sanskrit verse composed by Sri Bhagavan and read them together aloud as *deham-naham-koham-soham*. The words read together meant: "I am not the body. Who am I? I am He."

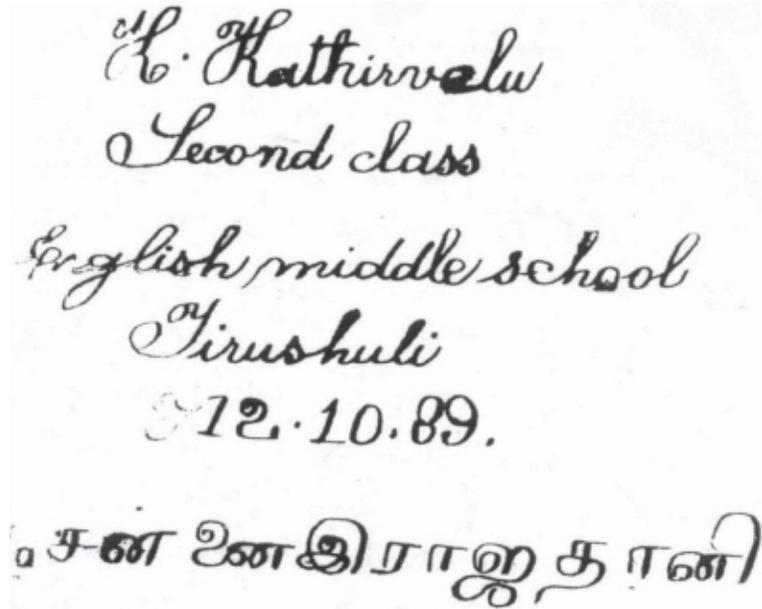
Sri Bhagavan heard her and exclaimed, “Very good! That will do. You need not read the rest of the stanza. What you have read is the quintessence of wisdom. Make it your mantra.”

Every time Sri Bhagavan saw Indira he would ask her to repeat her mantra so that she soon knew it by heart. (*Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, by G.V. Subbaramayya, pub. Sri Ramanasramam, 1967.)

We too should keep repeating this mantra, and soon with Bhagavan’s Grace, we will be able to hold the meaning of this mantra in our hearts.

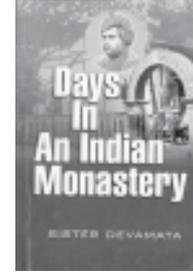
Activity

Here is another sample of handwriting. Can you guess who wrote it? How old was the person? When was it written?



Answer: Bhagavan, when he was 10 years old, wrote the name of his class mate in well-formed cursive hand-writing. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY by Sister Devamata. 2004. Sri RamakrishnaMath, Mylapore, Chennai. pp.326, Rs60.

This charming book was originally published in 1927. Born Laura Glenn to an American family in Ohio, she met Swami Vivekananda in 1899 in New York where she joined the newly founded Vedanta Society. In 1906, she met Swami Paramananda and became his first disciple. In 1909, she went to India and became closely associated with Swami Ramakrishnananda who founded the math at Chennai. While there, she met Swami Brahmananda and many of the close disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Later at Calcutta, she had the privilege of meeting and moving with the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi. The book is a chronicle of her stay.

It is an unusual book for those who delight in knowledge about Ramakrishna and his circle of disciples. It gives fascinating details about them as individuals and paints a realistic portrait of life in India and in particular, Chennai in the early 20th century. The book is very well written and a joy to read.

— Amrit Ray

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY OF INDIA: AP Joshi, MD Srinivas, JK Bajaj. 2003. ISBN81-86041-15-x. Pub: Centre For Policy Studies, 27 Rajasekharan St, Chennai 600004. pp. xxvii, Rs800.

This demographic study by the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) follows their masterpiece *Annam Bahu Kurvita* (reviewed in The MP, December 1998, p.271), a commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad high-lighting the central position occupied by the tradition of *anna daana* (offering of food to the ‘stranger’ at one’s door before partaking of the meal oneself) in the social, political and religious life of the Indian people since the dawn of time.

What is presented in the new offering from the CPS is an exhaustive compilation of the official religious demographic data of the last one hundred and twenty years for different regions of the Indian sub-continent (pre- and post-partition). This is also put in the context of the world by changes in the religious demography of the different countries and regions of the world during the course of the 20th century. The Indian Census, begun in 1871, has continued to maintain the British 'tradition' of classifying the people of India according to their religious affiliation. Since the book is mainly concerned with the heterogeneity introduced by Islam and Christianity, populations for the purpose of this study are divided into three large groups: 'Muslims, Christians and Indian Religion-ists' (the latter including Parsis and Jews). The official census data has been analysed and trends that stand out are presented. The trends highlight the severe retreat of the third group from the national borders of North-east, the South-west, and the North-west, and the islands of the Indian Union, and this is so, especially after Independence.

Yet, secular "*India on the whole has resisted Christianisation (remaining around 2%), nor succumbed to the expansion of Islam*" (my italics). China remains an impregnable bastion. Elsewhere especially in Africa, and SE Asiatic countries, Christians and Muslims have made significant gains.

The reviewer feels that numbers indeed are strength and have their story to tell, but religious reformation is a fact of history and shows that human beings cannot be contained for long within artificial boundaries which censor a daring inner quest. In all cross-pollinating conflict situations ('whom shall we offer our worship to?' *kasmai devaya havisha videma?*), rationality eventually empowers, within each religion, the pathways to that mystical inner space (despite selective, and sometimes quite 'successful' suppression these paths might have been subjected to, historically) which alone accommodates the deepest aspiration of every individual.

— J. Jayaraman

THE REAL TO THE UNREAL: Spirituality in Theory and Practice
Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 2003; pp.347, Rs 50. HB. First published by the Vivekenanda Vedanta Society, Chicago.

The book is a compilation of lectures by Swami Bhashyananda, who spent 20 years teaching spiritual aspirants in the US. Just as Sri

Ramakrishna often reiterated, *Joto moth, tato poth* (there are as many paths as there are religions), the book also begins with the introductory statement that spiritual traditions cannot be viewed in competition but as complementary discourses and practices, since each tradition has something special to offer with regard to our understanding of the Supreme.

In the first essay, entitled 'The Essentials of Religion', compares the origin of religion to the source of a river where water is pure and crystal clear. Every religion in its place of origin is pure in essence as it comes from the supreme Reality itself. In the essay 'God: Personal and Impersonal', the apparent two contradictory notions of the personal and the impersonal god are reconciled. The essay 'Apparent and Real Man' makes a very important distinction between man's true nature and his deluded self-perceptions, which can be corrected by mahavakyas like *tat tvam asi* when explained by a sadguru. In 'Consciousness and its Manifestations' and 'Analysis of Human Experience', Swamiji examines the notion of the five sheaths that comprise one's psychophysical being. He asserts that what remains after negating the five sheaths is not a void, but is the perceiver/subject in a mode of pure consciousness. To realize this state is the goal of mankind. 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion', identifies philosophy, mythology and ritual as three essential components of religion. Swamiji scrutinizes the common features of various religions, as well as the areas in which their truth-claims differ fundamentally. The general characteristics of all religions include theories about the existence of God, the soul, the original perfection of the soul, redemption of the soul, and the transcendental value of religious experience.

The section on Hinduism brings out its salient and unique features. The distinctive philosophical ideas of Hinduism are divinity of the soul, unity of existence, non-duality of God and harmony of religions. In 'The Spirit of the Bhagavad Gita', the author considers this text as presenting a total philosophy of life and science of yoga. The message of the Gita is an emphasis on the proper discharge of social obligations, and the practice of remaining undisturbed by the results of both good and evil actions. This brings out the idea of *samatva*, the equilibrium achieved by enduring pleasure and pain.

The text is nominally priced, sturdily bound, with few editorial and printing errors. It will be a valuable resource for a general readership.

— Kanchana Natarajan



THE YOGA OF THE 18 SIDDHAS. An Anthology. Edited by T.N. Ganapathy. Pub: Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications, Inc. Quebec, Canada. 2003. pp.618, Rs750/-. www.babaji.ca & info@babaji.ca

The tradition of the Tamil Siddhas is relatively unknown outside the confines of Tamil Nadu. The first attempt in English to cover some of the ground was *The Poets of the Power* by Kamil Zvelebil in 1971.

A scholar, Govindan Satchitananda has been instrumental in bringing to the public's eye details about the various Siddhas, but to date the general international reading public knows little or nothing about this ancient tradition. The present anthology goes some way to rectify this condition. The 18 Yoga Siddhas actually refers to more than a 100 individuals most of whom originated in Tamil Nadu. Some came from north India and they included Agastya, Tirumular and Goraknath. They rejected the normal parameters of religion and were true mystics who, if we are to believe them, had complete mastery over their physical bodies. Babaji Nagaraj, the extraordinary yogi mentioned in Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, is said to belong to this tradition.

The Sanskrit word siddha means fulfilled. The word in the Tamil Siddha tradition means the experience of Siva. They believe that Siva is without imitation and therefore to confine 'him' to temples or rituals is anathema. According to the editor, T.N. Ganapathy, "Sivam is grammatically and philosophically an impersonal conception. The real name for Sivam is 'It' or 'Thatness' or 'Suchness' or '*Paraparam*'." The Siddhas rejected scriptural authority and believed that mystical experience because it is formless cannot be confined by any system of thought. They had no central or defining deity to whom they prayed but we should not consider them to be atheists. They believed in God but not in the attachment we usually find among devotees of a particular local god or even in a so-called universal religion. They belonged to no religion or *samayam*, or convention or rule.

The Siddha teachings are framed in a special poetic language. They believed that only in poetic form was there a chance to give some hint of the intense spiritual experience which is available to those who sought the truth of Reality. Their language is called twilight language, *sandhya-bhasa*.

It is allusive and paradoxical. They practised Tantra yoga and are identified with alchemy.

This anthology brings together selections and translations from some of the notable Siddhas: Agastya, Tirumular, Bogar, Patanjali, Cattaimuni et al. This anthology is a natural introduction to this mysterious group of yogis. The translations are clear and the commentaries elucidate with skill the obscure points in the poems. This book is both a work of scrupulous scholarship as well as revelatory, stimulating work to the common man, uninitiated in this esoteric tradition.

I think we see here the opening up, in the best possible way, of yet another secret and hoary tradition, till recently spoken of in half hints but never truly understood.
— T.V. Ramamurthy

WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT KARMA by J.P. Vaswani. Gita Publishing House, Pune. pp.176, price not stated. www.sadhuvaswani.org

J.P. Vaswani is a well-known teacher and experienced orator. He has an impressive list of books to his credit, many of which are transcripts of his talks. If one had the privilege to watch his discourses on cable TV you would see a humble and compassionate man intent on sharing his wisdom with all who would listen. I appreciated his homilies with their down-to-earth tales to illustrate a point at hand.

Karma is a vast and controversial subject. It is an inviolable law that say what you do unto others you do to yourself. Newton's law states it baldly: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. J.P. Vaswani explains in straightforward but profound terms why all have experienced at some time in their life the fact that destiny seems so unfair. Vaswani explains how we can ameliorate the effects of karma in our lives by self-enquiry, self-surrender and selfless service. He discusses suffering and the power of the guru who can take over the karma of a worthy sishya; as well as such recondite questions as to the difference between God's Will and our personal actions.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book both for its wisdom and the lightness of the author's touch. It is worth more than a dozen erudite tomes heavy with empty profundities.
— Amrit Ray



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



An Experience as a Young Man

In the issue of *The Mountain Path* of January 1979 Vol. 16, No. 1, the article by Wolter Keers under the caption ‘Remaining as a Witness’ brought back most vividly memories of a similar experience undergone by Bhagavan when he was 17 years old.

I have very often read his death experience which led him to the discovery of the real ‘I’ in many books but this time I am overwhelmed when I compare this experience with mine which I experienced when I was 23 years old (now I am 74 years having been born in July 1932). It looks so vivid and clear that I cannot ignore or bypass it except to commit it to writing and if considered worth the while bring it to the notice of other devotees of Bhagavan through your journal.

I distinctly remember the date. It was September 1955. It happened to be a Saturday and it happened in the University Campus where I was resident in the Jayatilake hall. My batch happened to be the first occupants of the hall and in fact the campus when I took up residence for my first year of my course in the year 1952/53. Mother Nature has blessed this place called Peradeniya and everything was in pristine beauty and neatness.

It was a Saturday afternoon, about 1.30pm, a warm clear day without even a speck of cloud in the blue sky. A gentle breeze was blowing and everything was immaculately clean and green with closely cut grass. All my friends had gone either for a matinee show to some cinema in Kandy or to the library to do some work. It was after lunch and was unusually quiet. I walked up to the rampart overlooking the Gelioya Road, which passes through the campus. I sat myself on the green grass overlooking the road from which I could see for about fifty meters very clearly on either side.

Feeling a bit drowsy, I leaned back and laid on the grass and cupped my palms as support for the head, looking up at the sky. I could see the wide expanse of the blue sky on all four sides to the lowest horizon. I just looked up and waited, completely blank without a thought, not even admiring the beauty of space and colour of the sky. I was still, in a thoughtless state for about ten minutes.

Suddenly, a thought came into my mind. In this wide expanse of space, where is my place? Can I be counted even as a speck of dust? I, who has a name, identity and could trace my genealogy — where is my place? I am nowhere. A fear gripped me. I could not move my limbs or call out — as if paralysed from top to toe. I could not move but was aware of the surroundings. Under normal circumstances, I would have run off and started to read a book or looked at the newspaper or chatted with my friends or listened to some music.

I did not do anything but just stayed there under a cloud of fear. This state would have lasted for about five minutes and my limbs were mute and limp. Soon after, I felt a surge of power within me. It was something which I could not fathom or explain but was extremely powerful and it could control everything. Even the whole universe was under my command. I could control the distant stars, galaxies, the earth and the sky. There was not anything beyond me. Everything is in me. There is nothing apart from me and everything is contained in me. This power ran down my limbs and the entire body and then I began to move my limbs.

I got up from my stupor and brought my eyesight parallel to the ground. It is then I realised the duality of you, of this and that, near and far. I remembered my name, my parents and the course I was following in the University. I wanted to get back to *the* state I was in — a state of non duality, oneness and a state of timeless and spaceless existence, completely harmonious and peaceful.

But my earthly urges were too strong and the mind came back and took its seat in the saddle of hopes, desires and the past history. The exuberance of youth ran after the shadows of illusory living pleasures and pain. And now I am here with this vivid memory wondering as to why this scene should have been shown to me and retracted. But I am convinced in this late stage of my life it is the Universal Energy that lives in me and experiences all the fun and frolics. It gives me the ability, energy and the ways to experience this mortal coil for His Will and Pleasure. Let His Will BE Done.

— Siva Sivalingam, New Zealand

Dakshinamurti and Bhagavan

The Editorial of the April issue 'Dakshinamurti and Bhagavan' was superb. There are a few other points about Dakshinamurti in which readers may be interested.

Sri Bhagavan has said that the four Sanakas asked Dakshinamurti questions for more than a year and the answers given brought forth even more questions. Finally, Dakshinamurti in his benign grace remained silent. The urge in the Sanakas to ask questions disappeared by this potent Silence of the Master and they remained quiet, till eventually they understood the Truth. Bhagavan wrote about it in the second *Ashtakam* which addresses Arunachala, "You yourself could not explain [in words], to show yourself, you remained Silent as Arunachala!"

Bhagavan always said that Silence is His Teaching. Once some people wanted to record his voice. Bhagavan jokingly said,

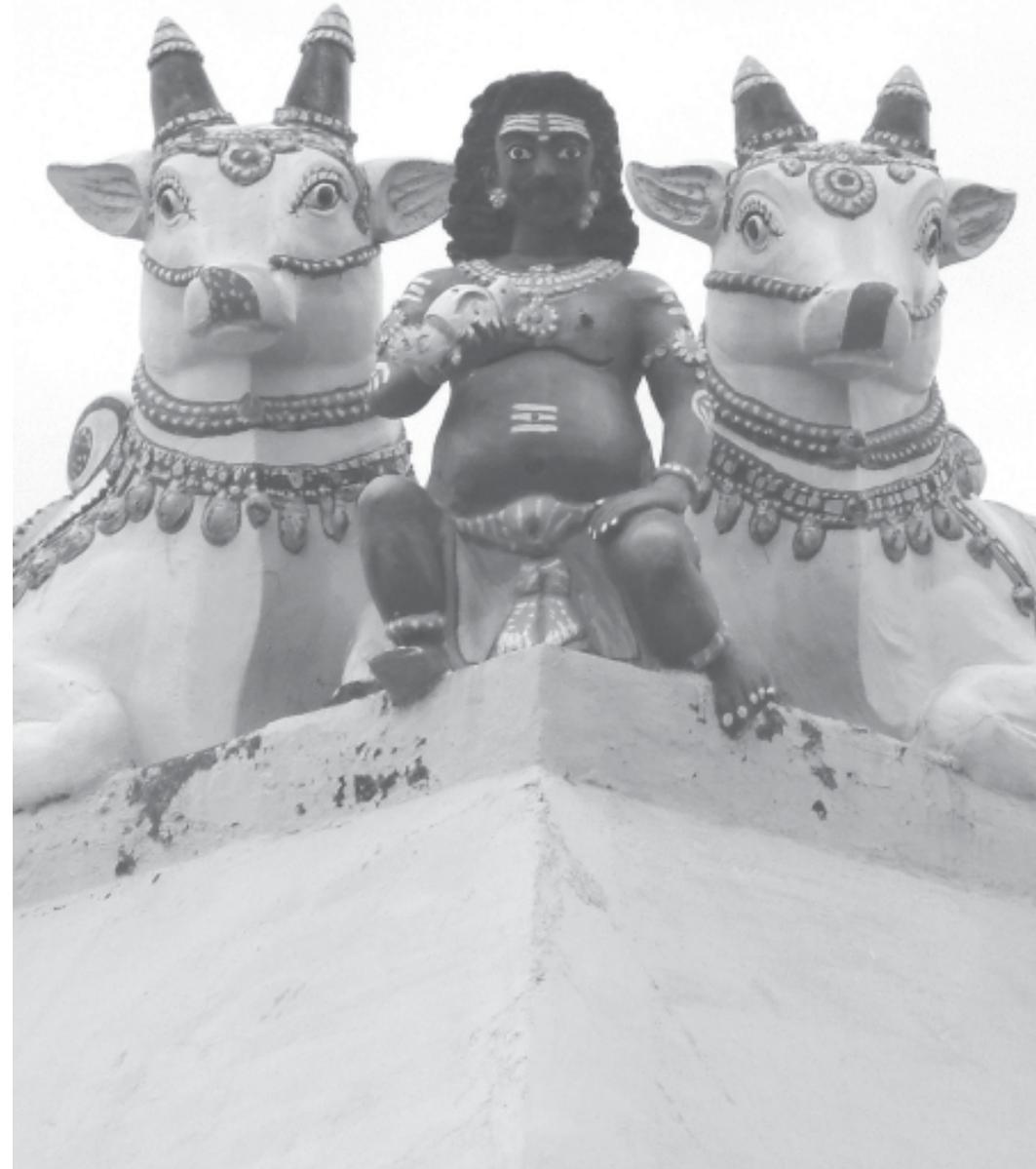
"Oy, they have come to record my voice, how can they?" They found that the recording does not take place and the tape was blank!

Regarding the Arunagiri Siddha who was under the banyan tree at the time when Bhagavan upon seeing a round big leaf, attempted to go closer and was prevented by wasps. That siddha is none other than Dakshinamurti, (who is Bhagavan now). We asked Sri Sadhu Om, why He chose the northern part of the Arunachala, because if so, He has to face north and it is said that Dakshinamurti faces south. Sri Swami said that Arunagiri Siddha does not face the world and that He is facing the hill. His attention is introverted by looking at Himself facing south. This was a revelation to me and I wished to share it with the readers of the magazine.

— N. Sankaran, Tiruvannamalai



ASHRAM BULLETIN



Maha Puja

Once, on the eve of the Mahapuja celebration, Sri Bhagavan narrated the story of Matrubbhuteswara which is the name of the deity in the Mother's shrine and also in the ancient temple at Tiruchirapalli. The Tamil rendering of the name was *Tayumanavar*. It means 'God that became Mother'. When Sri Bhagavan installed a lingam on his mother's samadhi, Sri Kavyakantha named it *Matrubhuteswara*. Alluding to the story and explaining the appropriateness of the name for the deity in the Mother's shrine, G. V. Subbaramayya wrote the following on Mahapuja Day:

It is related in the *Puranas* that when a woman devotee was in the throes of child-birth and no midwife was present to attend on her, the Lord Himself appeared as Mother and brought about a safe delivery. So the Lord came to be worshipped as *Matrubhuteswara*. Likewise when the world was [replete] with *maya* and was in sore need of the gospel of self-inquiry, the Lord taking form as Mother helped in the delivery of Bhagavan who is the very embodiment of that gospel. It is most fitting therefore that mother should come to be worshipped as *Matrubhuteswara*.¹

This year, *Vaishakha Babula Navami*, the day on which Sri Bhagavan liberated his mother from the cycle of *samsara* fell on the 21st of May. Abhishekam, decoration and puja were performed according to tradition at the Mother's shrine.

Ratha Yatra

Organised by Umramm Trust, Tiruchuzhi, the *Sri Ramana Sanmarga Gnana Ratha Yatra* arrived at the Ashram at 7 pm on Sunday, March 19th after the successful completion of the 2nd round of the yatra. After visiting more than 1,500 villages in various southern districts of

¹ *Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbaramayya.



Tamil Nadu, hundreds of Ashram devotees gave a traditional welcome as the Ratham entered the Ashram front gate.

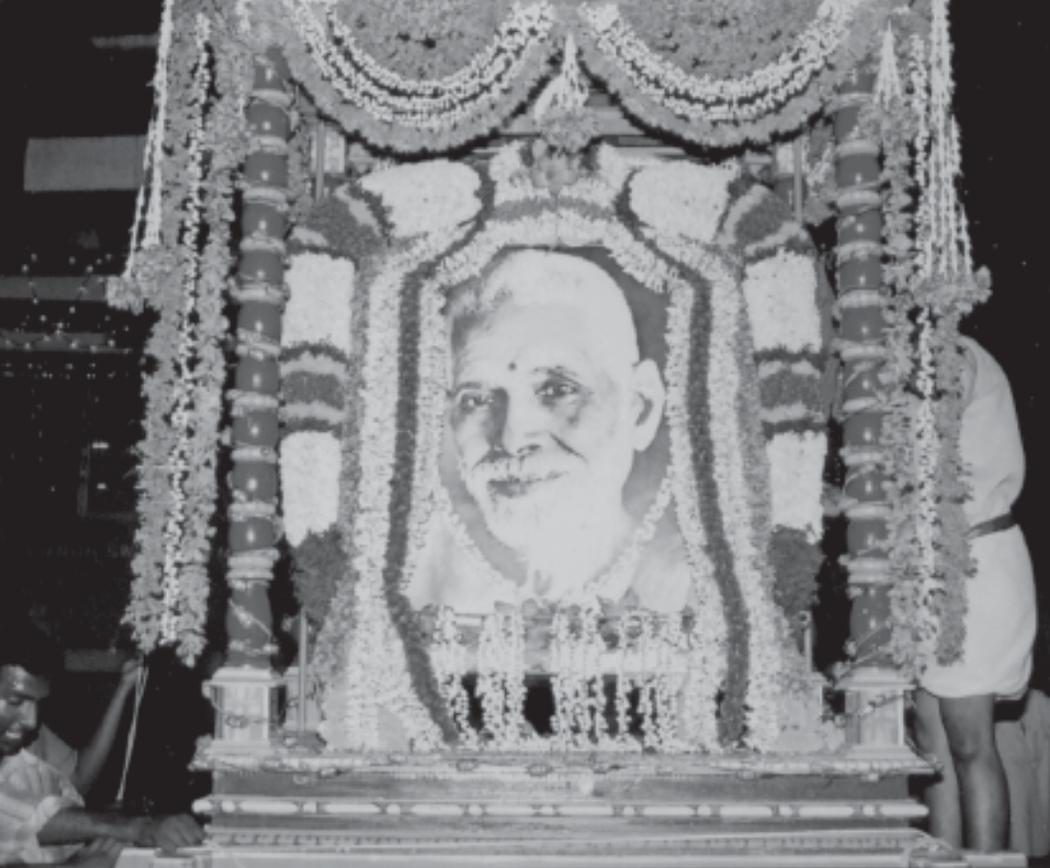
56th Aradhana

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 56th Aradhana was celebrated on April 25th. The early morning began with Tamil Parayana, followed by Mahanyasa japa, chanting of the *Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan*, Rudrabhishekam and a special puja to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. Mangala Aarti was performed at 10:45.

The evening brought an elaborate abhishekam with Vedacharyas from Coimbatore chanting ghana parayanam. Later in the evening a music programme, 'Ramana Music', by Smt. Ambika Kameshwar with accompaniment was given in the New Hall.

Aradhana Celebrations at Ramana Kendra, Mylapore

The 56th Aradhana was celebrated in Mylapore on April 25 with pujas, Annadhanam and Rathayathra. A procession organized by a Ramana Kendra devotee, Sri Srikant, followed a route around the Kapaleeswara



Temple, blessing devotees with the darshan of the beautifully decorated portrait of Sri Bhagavan.

Obituaries: Smt. Kunjammal

Smt. Kunjammal, a rare and ardent devotee and resident of Arunachalam attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan in April 2006. Following the tragic death a number of years back of their gifted son who had given up a promising career in government service to live at Arunachala, Smt. Kunjammal and her husband made the decision to spend the rest of their lives in the place their son had come to do tapas — at the feet of Arunachala. Even in her later years one could find her frail frame on pradakshina, in meditation at Durgambal temple or at Tamil parayana in the Ashram. Though, owing to failing health, she was forced to seek the aid of her children, she returned to Tiruvannamalai about two months ago in order to fulfill a longtime wish — to breathe her last in Bhagavan's and Arunachala's presence. By Bhagavan's grace this wish was granted. ▲